THE GORGON'S SEVERED HEAD

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C.A.E. LUSCHNIG

THE GORGON'S SEVERED HEAD

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STUDIES OF *ALCESTIS*, *ELECTRA*, AND *PHOENISSAE*

BY

C.A.E. LUSCHNIG

E.J. BRILL
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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

For my nieces and nephews

Jill, David, and Ashley
Robert and Donna
David Jamie
Elizabeth John
Victoria Joe
and Beth

with love

* * *

"Has it ever occurred to you that there are only two genres that can deal with family life? One of them is comedy."

She smiled ruefully, "And the other is . . ."

"The other is horror."

Geoff Ryman, *Was*

* * *

Καὶ δὴ προτείνω, Γοργόν' ὡς καρατομῶν.

Alcestis, 1118

* * *

περιδρόμῳ μὲν ἴτυος ἕδρᾳ
Περσέα λαιμοτόμαν ὑπὲρ
ἁλὸς ποτανοῖσι πεδί-
λοισι φυὰν Γοργόνος ἴσχειν . . .

Electra, 458–62

ἔρχεται δὲ σοὶ
κάρα 'πιδείξων οὐχὶ Γοργόνος φέρων,
ἀλλ' ὃν στυγεῖς Αἴγισθον.

Electra, 856

* * *

οὐ γὰρ τὸ λαιμότμητον εἰσορᾷς κάρα
Γοργόνος, ἀδελφὸν δ' εἰσορᾷς ἥκοντα σόν.

Phoenissae, 456

* * *

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C. A. E. L.
6.i.1994
Moscow, Idaho

INTRODUCTION

THREE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES: **MEN AND WOMEN BY ART**

gods get bored with men who have no stories . . .
Roberto Calasso

Only art can defeat death and despair. In *Alcestis* a woman dies to live up to, to be, her ideal self. She becomes an artistic representation of herself, a statue, a generic female relative living in the king's house. Through song and lies and fantasy she is restored to her place in her own home. For she is a better woman alive than dead, but only by her death was she able to become the leading character in her life. She must live on, relive the chaos of life which, for all its disorder and danger, is better than the perfection and deceptive immutability of death. Electra wakes the day and creates herself and her world anew each dawn out of her mourning and loss. Her imagination forms the other characters in her story. But they refuse to live up to her mythical and literary fantasies any more than the dismal landscape calls up visions of heroes striking down monsters who plague the earth. Even Clytemnestra, if she lives long enough, becomes simply banal. Aegisthus, too. Recognition in both plays is the work of the creative imagination, passed from the characters to the audience. *Phoenissae* gathers all the characters of the Theban story for a final farewell in which the living and the dead are reunited. Jocasta by living on after her traditional death establishes herself as a woman of courage and dignity, but even in this new role, she can take only so much. Although her attempt to reconcile her sons fails, her presence and their imminent death manage at the end to bring them to a mutual understanding, an acceptance that is more intimate than Eteocles' public and stagy acceptance in *Septem*. Here the two young men reach an understanding of self in relation not only to their genealogical "fate" but also to each other and the others involved in this complex self-driven story.

The old couple living on beyond their time becomes the past of their family and their city. Oedipus, the once potent king, is turned

into a frail wraith, cursing and querulous, his sons' creature and they his. The city closes in on itself and becomes its past, until there is nothing left but empty holes, vacant rooms where evil dwelled. Things happened in the past which cannot be escaped, but the present can change the past, how it is seen and even how it was. Oedipus emerges from a primitive past in which he has been living with his ghosts, in touch only with his savage, self-mutilating grief while his wife and sons grew into contemporary political actors. Creon in his grief is not yet savage, but he is already beginning to leave the world of reason and strategy when he imposes primitive ideas about revenge and pollution on an already tragic situation, following his nephews in brutalizing a brutalized man. In *Electra* the places where past evil was done are left behind, but even in the new setting, evil follows Electra, the evil in her heart and mind: the evil that was done to her becomes the evil she does. The humanity of the participants is assailed by the brutality of the traditional story and it fails to keep the enemy at bay. Characters are uncomfortable with the story in which they find themselves. Admetus tries on other roles until at last he can return to the only one that suits him.

The three plays treated here were chosen for the challenge more than for love. Two of them I have come to love, but *Phoenissae* remains, like its own Eteocles, intractably unlovable. The plays come from different stages of Euripides' career, one from each volume of the OCT. All show past and present, tradition and truth in conflict. All show characters acting to escape the stories in which they find themselves. All make innovative uses of the spaces, real and imaginary, of the stage and the scene building. All have presented critics with generic doubts. And finally, all three are about women who are moral agents, women who do significant acts in the world, who act within their traditional stories and within their socially imposed roles and at the same time defy them and create them anew. Though Alcestis is silent at the end of her play, these are women who speak and through speech control the action, whether young wife and mother, unmarried (or falsely married) woman, or elderly widow, mother, and grandmother. Euripides has given them all parts as agents and as victims, like the rest of us.

ἀλλ' ἔλεγεν ἡ γυνή τέ μοι . . . χἠ παρθένος χἠ γραῦς ἄν.
The wife had her say, and the girl, and the old granny.

Aristophanes *Frogs*, 949–50.

Most of all, these three plays show the human spirit at its most creative, creating a life and a story. The stories wrench the women and men from oblivion and from the finality of death. Like the actors who play them they have returned to face the audience as someone else. Only the mask is fixed, like a statue, the Gorgon's victim turned to stone. A horror story is better than no story at all. The gods will not be bored.

CHAPTER ONE

ALCESTIS: THE AESTHETIC IDENTITY OF ALCESTIS AND THE CRAFTSMANSHIP OF ADMETUS

> ... interiors of houses,
> And particular human lives
> Of which the chronicles make no mention.
> *Czeslaw Milosz*

1. *Introduction: Considerations of Genre and Gender*

The *Alcestis* is a difficult play. This is the one thing on which most of its interpreters agree. It defies generic classification.[1] There is little agreement among the critics with regard to anything else.[2] Not only is there controversy over what the piece is about, but more than anything else it is disputed whether it is more comic or more tragic or more fourth playish[3] in tone. And it is even a matter of adult consideration whether the characters are likeable or not.[4] More even

[1] For another view Paduano (1969:14–17). On the various appellations that have been attached to the *Alcestis*, see Riemer (1990:1–6) and Seidensticker (1982:129–130).

[2] Including whether or not its generic uniqueness is (as I believe it to be) significant.

[3] For a recent and sensitive contribution to this question see Buxton's last heading on the tone of the play (1987):27–29. Segal (1993):40 offers a fine statement on the subject, "Euripides not only combines and confuses comic and tragic moods but also makes this combination the central issue in his play by focusing on the defeat of death's necessity." See also pp. 48–50 on the mixing of tones and genres. Seidensticker (1982):129–152 provides a summary of the gamut of genres to which *Alcestis* has been assigned (130).

[4] Thomas Rosenmeyer (1963), for example, says that Euripides has made "likely and likeable characters, forced to grapple with necessities and trying to preserve their small portion of culture and dignity" (p. 247) and, on the other hand, Charles Rowen Beye (1959), believes that neither Alcestis nor Admetus is a very attractive person (pp. 126–7). Most recently Charles Segal writes (1992):147, "Whether or not we like Admetus any better at the end will probably continue to be a matter of controversy." It is hardly unusual for the critics to disagree about the meaning of the drama. Perhaps even the consideration of the characters' likeableness points to a generic distinction between this play and those universally called *tragedies*: our students may worry about whether Oedipus or Medea is likeable, but more mature readers rarely broach such questions. Why then do we care about the affability of Admetus or Alcestis unless we are dealing with a more homely type of drama?

than most other Euripidean dramas, the *Alcestis* eludes our grasp. The play clearly does have more in common with tragedy (in language, construction, subject, and themes) than with any other genre, at least any that existed at its time, and it is commonly (sometimes to its detriment) treated as generically little or no different from the tragedies of Euripides. On the side of tragedy, it shares the ambiguities and disjunctions and questionings of dominant values that are a characteristic of serious Greek literature from Homer on.[5] It is about characters with names known from the traditional stories, playing their parts within those traditional stories, and so—although this is an aspect it may have in common with satyr play—it is not a comedy in the ancient sense.[6]

Its themes are the serious ones typically treated in tragedy: life and death;[7] the disintegration of the family or social structure, in the very attempt, as so often happens, to preserve it;[8] heroism and its relation to other more mundane human modes or modalities;[9] the ambiguity of divine favor, why it is granted and to whom and what it means to its recipients; the doubleness (or multiplicity) of causation; the deceptive and transitory nature of human definitions and predications, something that interested Euripides early and late in his career;[10] the definition of life in terms of death;[11] men and women facing death and despair and coming to terms with them. Whether or not these serious themes are treated seriously is one of many unanswered and probably unanswerable questions. Or are they—as seems to me most likely—now serious, almost tragic, now less profound, nearly comic?[12]

On the other hand, the play does share some characteristics with

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[5] See for example Segal (1984):41–67, 1993 (4–5). On the other side, especially Rabinowitz (1993):10–11, etc.

[6] Nor is it a comedy in the contemporary sense, except among literary critics of a certain training and tradition.

[7] Diano (1976):71 writes, "l'*Alcesti* è una meditazione della morte."

[8] Simon (1988):7–8 and more recently, des Bouvrie (1990):200–213.

[9] See Arrowsmith (1974):3–27 for the interpretation of the *Alcestis* as a "modal tragedy." On female κλέος see O'Higgins (1993):77–82.

[10] On these and other themes see especially Wesley Smith (1960) p. 128, Anne Pippin Burnett (1965) p. 242, William Arrowsmith (1974) pp. 4–11.

[11] Most recently, Segal (1992):152–7.

[12] On this consult Castellani's careful and sensitive analysis of the construction of the drama which he divides into a tragic half and a comic half (1979): esp. 487–8. Also Rivier (1975, *Essai*):38.

satyric drama. Its folktale elements,[13] for example, seem to be typical of that genre, as well as its length, its riddling language and theme, and the willingness to tolerate the conquest of death,[14] though the idea of a second chance is not altogether absent from tragedy.

The play shares with the *Electra* of Euripides and some other plays a certain emphasis on the details of everyday life, clothing, food, drink, feasting and entertaining, housekeeping and household appurtenances, which are often associated with comedy, but might equally be associated with epic, and with the *Odyssey* in particular.[15] Like the *Odyssey*, the *Alcestis* is concerned with re-establishing the house of the king, with filling the vacuum caused by the loss of a member vital to its continuation, although the gender roles are here reversed: the wife having departed and being received back by the husband. It is, in turn, the wife's identity that, with her preternatural return, is in doubt and she who must be recognized before she is allowed to reenter the home in the capacity of wife; and she goes through a series of changes in status, like Odysseus, before her ultimate acceptance. Admetus, like Penelope, shows an interest in the "stranger" before she is formally recognized: this is part of the creation or re-constitution of the lost spouse, who has lost her or his identity, Odysseus through his wandering, lies, and disguise, Alcestis through her idealization

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[13] See Lesky (1925), esp. 4–12, 20–40, and 85–6; Beekes (1986): *passim*; and for a good summary and bibliography, Conacher (1967):327–33.

[14] Seaford (1984):2 writes, the *Alcestis* "cannot be called a satyr play, although the theme, and to some extent the mood are characteristic of the genre." On riddling language and perplexity see Seaford, p. 41 and n. 122. In general on the characteristics of the genre, Seaford 32–44 and Sutton (1980):180–183 on the "prosatyric play." On the conquest of death, Parry (1978):158 says, "perhaps in the end the truth of the *Alcestis* is in part at least the truth of wishful thinking."

[15] See Knox, "Euripidean Comedy" in *Word and Action* for the emphasis on everyday things in a number of Euripidean plays: on *Electra* pp. 252–5; on *Alcestis* p. 255, and on the relationship of this emphasis to the *Odyssey*, pp. 268–9. The *Iliad* too is full of these things, formulaic feasts and sacrifices, full descriptions of clothing and armor, catalogues of possessions and gifts. No one has suggested that the *Iliad* has much in common with comedy in spite of its rich detail in describing everyday things. Of course it is a matter of focus: much of the focus of the *Odyssey* is on the mundane, on the return from the "heroic" world to the more ordinary world of family and possessions. Among other parallels of the *Alcestis* with the *Odyssey* are the emphasis on the interior of the house, on servants, furnishings, clothing, the unseemly feasting, the abdication of the father in favor of his son, the return of the "stranger" in disguise, the renewal of the wedding. See Conacher's notes on the homely aspects in his edition of the *Alcestis* (1988):192 (*ad* 947). On the suggestion and its refutation that Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Orestes* are prosatyric, see Sutton (1980):190.

and death.[16] In the *Odyssey*, however, there is testing on both sides: both wife and husband must accept each other. The convenient silence of Alcestis has invited some readers to wonder what tests she may have in store for her husband after the play is over, but the scene of the testing (or temptation) of Admetus by Heracles (and by Admetus himself) may be thought to serve the function of the testing of Penelope by Odysseus (the roles being reversed), within the economy of drama as opposed to the plenitude of epic.[17] Whether or not he passes his test is another matter, and one that has been much discussed.[18] The confusion (or inversion) of gender distinctions is part of a pattern of mythic distortions and blurrings in the play.[19]

The fact that the play has (or seems to have) a happy ending[20] (as do, among other serious works, the *Odyssey*, at least for the central characters, and the *Oresteia*, for Orestes and society) does not, however, necessarily, diminish the suffering of characters who interest us and with whom we sympathize. This human action (the play's middle) is framed by the two humanly impossible ends. Though the separation of the two spouses is short-lived compared to that in the *Odyssey*, it is, one would have supposed, a more final one. The insistence by Heracles that Admetus *not* remain faithful to his departed wife and the shortness of the period of separation before he is tempted and falls (if he does "fall") contribute to the less than tragic tone of the drama. Our foreknowledge of Heracles' interference may have a similar effect.

The ambiguities, moreover, (one is reluctant—in the face of recent Euripidean critics who with some justification find the term overused—to call them "ironies") of the *Alcestis* are like those of the other plays of Euripides that were staged in the right position to have been called tragedies (that is, all his surviving plays except the *Cyclops*) by

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[16] See Douglas J. Stewart, *The Disguised Guest*, Lewisburg, PA, 1972, esp. p. 34; cf. Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, Berkeley, 1975, Chapter 4 pp. 179–238.

[17] On the silence and the silencing of women see Segal (1993):86; Rabinowitz (1993):84–93 for a new interpretation of the last scene.

[18] On the ambiguity of the scene Lloyd (1985):128–9 and his note 42 on the criticism of Admetus.

[19] On the relation of gender to tragedy and the use of the "feminine for the purpose of imagining a fuller model for the masculine self" (85) see Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine," in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990):65–96. See also Rabinowitz's controversial study (1993), especially 1–27 and 67–99 and Rehm (1994):84–96.

[20] On the "happy ending" read von Fritz (1962) esp. 312–16. Rivier (1975) offers a more subtle and tactful view. See also Schein (1988):204–6.

the ancients (if not by some modern critics who Polonius-like—though without the tedious old man's exuberance—invent genres to suit their own interpretations of the individual plays or to correspond to some unspoken, but nonetheless identifiable, definition of tragedy).

Most particularly typical of Euripides are two aspects: the blurring of distinctions, the equating or reversing of polarities held dear by the Hellenes (not to mention other peoples of other ages). Among these are such polarities as male and female, man and god, slave and free, inside and outside, and most compelling in the *Alcestis*, alive and dead. And second the self-conscious artistry of the main characters in creating new roles for themselves.

Chief among the paradoxes of the play doubtless is the ending: its contradiction of the things done (Alcestis dies) and said (the dead cannot be brought back, for instance, averred by every character except Apollo but including Heracles who is able to do it) inside the drama and its contradiction of the reality we experience, its disregard of what we know to be true and possible. In this, of course, it is not alone in tragedy (or in other dramatic genres), but we (sharing the ancient Greeks' realistic view of the vicissitudes of human life and the finality of death) are more inclined to accept the incredible when it brings disaster than when it brings blessedness, and so we must somehow buffer the "happy ending" of the *Alcestis* by putting quotation marks around the words, if in no other way. For the play is not about the beatification, as it were, of a woman who dies for her husband and children. It goes beyond that. It has a bite, but the sting of death is also taken away.

"Alive and dead," says Heracles (528), "they seem different to me." They seem so to all of us ordinary mortals. And they *are* different.[21] But, somehow, in this play, Euripides has managed to blur even that most essential (or existential) distinction.[22] This, life and death and

[21] Different, yes, but which is better is sometimes in dispute. The ancient cliché, *count no man happy until you see him dead*, with its numerous variants, may seem less distant to the fans or fanatics of the recent motion picture, *The Rapture*. Aristophanes found in this aspect of Euripides' thought some fine fodder for parody (*Frogs* 1477, 1082). Rabinowitz (1993) also joins in the discussion when she asks us to wonder "what Alcestis learns in the last scene of the play, and whether she would wish to return to life with that knowledge" (96, cf. 76 where she asks the same question about Alcestis' remarriage).

[22] J. Gregory writes of the blurring of the distinction between city and cemetery (1979):263. See Buxton (1987) who perceptively points out that Alcestis is shown throughout the play between life and death:19–23.

the point where these opposites become or seem to become one (or are said to become one), is one of the things that the play is about and one of the things that makes this play special. Another is the extension of the dramatic space beyond what we see and beyond what really happens into the offstage spaces, both interior and exterior and into other only tangentially connected stories that belong to the minor characters and even to the chorus. Connected to this is the interior landscape of Admetus: uncomfortable in the story in which he finds himself, he imagines himself in other myths or literary works.

These themes, paradoxes, mythological forays and how Alcestis and Admetus work with them to create themselves will be the central subjects of the present chapter.

2. *Family Values*

Alcestis is the **best**.[23] She wins the competition as best wife to Admetus, best mother to her children, best mistress to the servants, best daughter-in-law to Pheres and his wife, this last, doubtless, without meaning to. These are her roles in life. Her maid tells us to think of her mistress' life and dying in these competitive and superlative terms (152–5). Compared to her, everyone else comes off badly, except possibly Heracles.[24] Alcestis achieves her aesthetic identity early in the play and continues to maintain it. And—though dead—she continues if not to control the plot, at least to maintain a strong influence over it, more than might reasonably be expected of one in her condition. The dead are so often helpless, but not so Alcestis.[25] Compare for a moment Alcestis and Antigone:[26] Antigone is very nearly forgotten immediately after her death is reported. Nobody carries her body back from the tragic scene. In her play Alcestis

[23] See Karen Bassi (1989):19–30, esp. 25–27 where ἀρίστη is said to be used "to describe Alcestis in what seems to be a heroic 'male' sense." Dolores O'Higgins (1993):77–98 writes of the ways in which Alcestis' glory is compromised. See also Lavinia Lorch (1988):69–127, esp 77–8.

[24] In fact even his life is less than perfect since he is subject to Eurystheus in general; and in particular, within the play, he disgraces himself socially, inadvertently showing disrespect for Alcestis in the eyes of her loving servant.

[25] Bassi's conclusion (n. 1), 28 that the silence of Alcestis suggests the powerlessness and voicelessness of women in a masculine world does not seem to take this into account. Even dead Alcestis is very much in control.

[26] See Blumenthal (1974):174–5 on the relation between *Antigone* and *Alcestis*.

walks back from the tomb where Admetus had tried to enact a Haemon-like tragedy (opportunely prevented by the chorus who not only witness the funeral but also protect Admetus from his more desperate self-dramatization, 897–9).

From the first Alcestis is unique, the **only** member of the family to be willing to give up her life for Admetus' (17, 368). A threat exists to her vision of herself and to her hopes for the preservation of that image in the minds of all. It is that at times this unique and heroic woman is in danger of becoming generalized.[27] Only one can be the best. Her noble act—an act that should be immutable once it is completed in the death witnessed by all—is turned by Pheres into foolishness on her part and cowardice on her husband's (697, 728). This threatens her aesthetic identity and the value of her heroism.[28] Even the dead are sometimes able to be changed. Luckily Pheres' provoked view does not take over the story and become the play's reality. Nevertheless it had to be suggested just so that it could be rejected in new turnings of the plot.

But, worse than that single utterance of a derogatory epithet (ἄφρονα, 728), Alcestis' unique deed of heroic selflessness is turned by Pheres into a repeatable occurrence. "Court others so that more may die" (720) he challenges, in belated response to his son's equally disreputable command to his father to get more sons, a command which is accompanied by a threat not to bury him (662–5). "You have been clever to find a way to avoid death if you can persuade your latest wife to die for you" (699–701). Pheres generalizes a single

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[27] As J. M. Bell points out, too, the chorus tends to reduce the situation to a normality and deny what is special about Alcestis and Admetus (1980):43–75.

[28] The very word ἄφρονα (728) used of her by Pheres is an assault on her εὔκλεια: which ought to have been assured for all time to come: surely she expected it to be. The reader may think ahead to Phaedra dying to preserve her good name and managing to project a vision of herself which takes over the plot, but only long enough to cause Hippolytus's death and his father's complicity and ultimately to ruin her good name; for no one would deny that Phaedra's name is synonymous with the wicked woman who desires and destroys the innocent youth: what the genius of Euripides manages to do in the extant *Hippolytus* is to create a Phaedra who is in some way innocent and to make her victim not altogether guiltless, a great feat of originality and compassion. *Pace* Kovacs, *The Heroic Muse*, Baltimore (Johns Hopkins), 1987:30. Doubtless Phaedra acts according to heroic views of honor, but she is and remains, when all is said and done, a paradigm of immoral behavior and female destructive passion. Euripides, only one poet in a long line to do so, demonstrates how the hero, by taking a radical position destroys herself and loses the very thing she wishes to keep or obtain. This is one of the ways *logos* tells the truth about the ambiguities of life.

act as if it were something common, as if this miracle of uxorial virtue is to be expected of any wife.[29] In fact it is usually neither possible to take someone's death nor desirable: the former we know instinctively; the other is a strong (though perhaps not a deadly serious) message in the play. The opportunity is an irrational gift to Admetus, the desirability a thoughtless reaction on Admetus' part and an aesthetic choice on Alcestis', which like any significant choice requires a narrowing of vision. Is this narrower vision of life culturally imposed? In part it may be suggested to Alcestis by her secondary position as a woman, but it is also seen by herself and others as unique and heroic, as at least carrying to superhuman extremes the subordination of women and at the same time breaking the culturally imposed barriers that deny this kind of ἀρετή to women. Surely Admetus' surprise and indeed consternation at the result of Alcestis' acceptance (her fading existence and death) means that the choice was unexpected and even (almost) unwelcome. Its effect on the lives around her is, like most other acts of heroism, chaotic. Heroism, whether of men or women, is ambiguous and tends to cause instability in what ought to be the most ordinary of family relations. The emotional and social chaos her sacrifice causes strongly suggests that it is not to be seen as a cultural norm. Alcestis has gone beyond the limits. That one person should risk her life or his for another happens all the time. What is fantastic (and perhaps therefore lacking in tragic weight) about this plot is its mechanical inevitability, the certainty that Alcestis will die and Admetus will live. The risk has been removed. It is also the impossibility of this grim certainty that (besides making a second chance possible through the impossible reversal of what was already impossible) makes it possible to explore the act of living and dying for another[30] in a less than serious mode. A physical, ogreish Death is less serious than the real thing. A (however mildly) censorious Alcestis who revives from this monster's stranglehold to give injunctions to her husband making her children his keepers is less tragic, though perhaps more realistic, than a tragi-

[29] For I do not think Rosemary Nielsen is exactly right in saying that Alcestis has "fundamentally revolutionized the obligations required of a wife" or that "any act other than death would be a betrayal," (1976):92–102 (p. 96). On the other hand I admire Nielsen's revaluation of Pheres and his response to Apollo's proposition as showing "moral fortitude" (99).

[30] See Lorch (1988) 70, "This death spurs them to try to define the difference between life and mere survival, to develop a philosophy of life in the face of death and give meaning to existence."

cally resigned dying heroine. The fact that she imposes terms[31] allows her to remain in control of the plot. It also gives substance to the life she is leaving and to which she will return, not only as a statue, but as a woman. It is Admetus whose existence needs substantiation before it can be improved.

Alcestis' sudden insistence that Admetus show his respect and gratitude by remaining a widower opens the way for the exploration of her act and its effect as an aesthetic choice. It makes us narrow our focus and at the same time elaborates our picture with richer personal and domestic detail. In effect Alcestis' request forces Admetus to keep her place for her. He in turn asks *her* to prepare a place for *him* (364).

The agreement between husband and wife has been known for some time but neither Pheres nor Heracles knows of the deathbed codicil.[32] Thus Pheres can suggest a generalization of marriage/sacrifice/death without profoundly affecting our perception of Alcestis' accomplishment from her point of view, because we—in this case the first person encompasses Admetus, the chorus, and the audience—know that there will be no others and can be no others. Such remarks from Pheres do make our reaction to him even less favorable, however we may feel about his right to say *no* to an early death, his right, that is, to live his own life for himself. Heracles, on the other hand, must bring back the one and only Alcestis. And yet only by pretending that she is to be a *new* wife for Admetus (or more accurately a new *woman* for his use or the use of his house) can he make Admetus pause long enough in his attempt to do the right thing[33] for his acceptance of her to be meaningful. And thus Admetus becomes a more active partner in his married life. The scene of recognition is

[31] Cf. Lorch (1988):75–6.

[32] That this is a sudden and unexpected change in the terms of the agreement is clear from her original acceptance of the other woman in the reported marriage bed scene and rejection of her in the last will and testament speech. Admetus had not thought about it before as is clear from the fact that he considers the arrangement and agrees to it on the spot, after bringing up the various objections to it and dismissing them. Alcestis says for the last time, "on these conditions" as she hands over the children to Admetus' care. He, as she says, is to be their mother now. This discussion brings the agreement between Alcestis and Admetus into the play, in spite of the insistence of many critics that it is outside the play and therefore irrelevant. Its purpose is both to add the new condition on which much of the tension in the plot depends *and* to make the original agreement part of the present action.

[33] He is praised for his fidelity to his wife, 1095, something those who accuse him of breaking all his promises to her tend to forget.

brief, but in it both Admetus' love for Alcestis and the perfection of the family which she had taken to the grave with her are clearly admitted and clearly perceived (by Admetus and by the audience and—some of us may hope—by Alcestis herself). Only by appearing to be somebody else can she make herself not only appreciated but even *known*. Of course, if this is, as is generally accepted, a two-actor play, she *is* somebody else, which adds to the ambiguity of her resurrection.[34] Her perfection is achieved at the beginning of the human action and it continues to exert its influence throughout the play.[35]

There are some harsh disjunctions in the Pheres scene. And there is an interruption in the first Heracles episode where Alcestis is briefly forgotten by the chorus, but the play soon gets back on course. What Alcestis must fight while she is still alive, and after she is dead what must be fought in her name, is generalization. It is easy for any member of a Greek household—and especially so for a woman—to be subsumed by the house and family. Alcestis participates in this subordination of herself and attempts to reject it even as she accepts it. She achieves an identity as Alcestis, Pelias' daughter, the *best* wife and mother,[36] but becomes more and more generalized after her death. The confusion of Heracles caused by Admetus' equivocation (531) is an obvious example of the participation of language in this enigma:

> γυνή· γυναικὸς ἀρτίως μεμνήμεθα.
> a woman, just now we were talking about a woman . . .
> my wife, just now we were talking about my wife . . .
> a woman . . . just now we were talking about my *wife* . . .
> my wife . . . just now we were talking about a . . . woman.

[34] See Lorch (1988) esp. 122–125.

[35] Once again we might contrast her with Phaedra whose aesthetic picture of herself, though it affects the plot, does not outlive her role in the tragedy by very long. Or with Medea and Iphigenia who achieve and make manifest their essences only at the ends of their stories and only after failing at other roles—sister/wife/mother and daughter/bride respectively—do they display their heroic (and in the case of Medea also demonic) natures, although Medea's adherence to a heroic value system is hinted at throughout. On Medea's traditional heroic qualities, see among others, Elizabeth Bongie, "Heroic Elements in the *Medea* of Euripides," *TAPA* 107 (1977), 27-56. See Boedeker (1991) on Medea as the author of her own myth, esp. 109, where she writes of Medea's "collusion with Euripides in creating her own new λόγος."

[36] She was "the fairest of the daughters of Pelias" too. But considering what his other daughters did to him, it did not take much to be the best daughter to Pelias. Only her father and a rather obscure brother are mentioned in the play. On Alcestis as a character in Euripides' earliest play, the lost *Peliades* of 455, see T. B. L. Webster (1967):32–36.

(the last, as if he could not help saying *wife*, but then pretends to change the subject or lapses into vagueness). The previous lines had been about Alcestis and her undertaking (518–527). Or it could be that Admetus tries to lead Heracles back to the truth, by correcting the gender: Heracles had asked who died, using the masculine participle (530). After Admetus' attempt to bring him back one step at a time, Heracles distracts him again with a question (532), was she kin to you or not, which Admetus answers truthfully, but at the same time deceptively (533, 535).

Is this what Alcestis rebels against when she insists that Admetus not marry again? Does she anticipate the generic use of *her* role or the generalizing plural that Pheres suggests, the might have been: "the wives of Admetus who died for him," when he suggests that his son has found a way of avoiding death, not just once, but every time his time is up (699–701, 720)? Her own life is perfected by the way she lived it[37] and by her leaving of it. Very near the end of her life she pictures another woman taking her place. That woman could not be as σώφρων as she. Alcestis, therefore, contrives a way to make the marriage she is leaving as perfect and unique as her life has been. Only as she says farewell to her marriage bed does she think of another woman lying in it—the imperfect woman in fact that she chose *not* to be. For if she had chosen to go on living and to marry again, she would be like that not so σώφρων but luckier woman. She would remarry a man very much like Admetus and go on with her life very much as she had been living it. So at least she says, and there seems to be no dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage on either side. There is no place in this play, nor in Alcestis' view of how life and the plot should go on without her, for the misogynistic gibes about the estate of matrimony that are so common in comedy, and this is why Pheres' remarks that are close to monostichic jokes are so out of place (720, for example, and 728).

It is a truism that Euripides did not need to tell the audience what they already knew about marriage and women's lives,[38] but can we

[37] For as Gail Smith so wisely points out (1983):129–145, there is a better way for Alcestis to honor her husband than by dying for him: living for him (see esp. pp. 130, 136–40). The growing realization of this leads to progress in her restoration.

[38] In general, of course Ann Norris Michelini is right in saying, "Euripides did not have to explain to the audience what was part of their background knowledge about life," (1987):327. But whether the widow inevitably left behind her children by her late husband or not surely depends upon a number of circumstances and the assumption that she did needs reexamination.

assume that they *knew* something that is clearly contradicted by the words in the play? Epic attitudes are in evidence, but do they alone account for Alcestis' assumption that she could have remarried and kept her children? Does Alcestis see herself as a Penelope figure?[39] Penelope lived in waiting and scheming to keep her marriage alive, whereas in the play Alcestis is dying to keep her husband alive. She must do something to keep her marriage alive too. This accounts in some measure for Admetus' inability either to face or tell the truth about her death, in that she, too, refuses to be altogether dead and his job is to hold her place for her. Of course it is true that Alcestis has another explanation for her request that Admetus not remarry—namely protecting her children, especially her little girl, from a venomous stepmother, an equally compelling reason. This is not to say that there are overt and secret meanings available to different members of the audience, but that the motivation for a major, life-changing, decision is necessarily multiple and frequently agglutinative, as Antigone's famous antinomous motives tell us. Here we may possibly spot a concession to realism. These are plays not arguments.

The presence of a little girl is unusual enough for us to ask why did Euripides give Alcestis a daughter[40] when most children in tragedy are boys? The girl is singled out, not, to be sure, with a speaking part, but as a child with different needs than her brother's. True, she is not individualized, nor for that matter is her brother. The differences marked between the two children are definitely gender-related, and so, generic rather than particular.

Admetus, it turns out, is dispensable. If he had died the children would have been orphans. But they are called orphans anyway (165, 297). His father would have spent his declining years in sorrowful childlessness (cf. 621–2), but an angry Admetus (perhaps his anger is exacerbated by his father's claim that he really would have cared if his son had died) taunts him with childlessness (735). Alcestis is not dispensable: she sees to it that life is not going to be the same with-

[39] When Alcestis talks about remarrying whomever she should choose (284–6), is it in imitation of words said about Penelope by her son, when she could be a widow, but has chosen not to be one: "to whomever her father bids her go and who is pleasing to her" (*Odyssey* II, 114)? Of course the situation is different because Telemachus is of age (just) and Alcestis' children are still too young to fend for themselves and her father is dead.

[40] See M. Dyson (1988):13–23 for an original treatment of the significance of the presence or absence of the children in given scenes of the drama and for the care with which Euripides has planned her family for her for the greatest effect.

out her. She makes it questionable whether Admetus really did survive his own death. On the other hand there is no doubt that she does survive hers, whether as a blessed daimon or a living person or as the play suggests, with its successive endings (before and after Heracles), paradoxically, but plain to see, as both.

For stage time alone the protagonist[41] of the *Alcestis* must be Admetus. The focus (most of the time) is on his suffering and learning, if in fact he does learn.[42] One of the anomalies is that the men (Apollo, the chorus, Admetus himself, Heracles) keep talking about Admetus as if he were the center of attention, but the play's structure concentrates our attention on Alcestis, shows her being heroic, stealing the show, directing the other parts, for two scenes anyhow and continuing to direct the plot after her death.

The chorus has come to the palace in order to show Admetus sympathy and when they finally do express their dismay at their king's action, they are not so much concerned with the fact that he let his wife die in his place, as with the etiquette of receiving a house guest on the day of her funeral. The various characters who come on after Alcestis' death are there primarily to show the character and relationships of Admetus.

Still, Alcestis' point of view, the female perspective, is maintained face to face with Admetus' point of view and at times overwhelms it. The importance of the wife to herself and of the social milieu in which she has her being, the *oikos*, is not only maintained but extended beyond what we can actually see, the public façade of the *oikos* (that is, the *skēnē*) into the completely imaginary space behind it, the intimate feminine interior where the woman holds central place

[41] The play does have in its cast two genuine *heroes*, **Alcestis** (whose heroic status is established in the play's time both by what she does and by what is said about her after her death), to whom a hymn is sung as if to the powerful spirit of a heroine and whose heroic *nachleben* is said to be assured in various genres and *poleis* (435–66); and **Heracles** who (unlike Apollo) in the play obviously needs no introduction. It is these heroes who perform significant human actions. It is they who are capable of making a real and positive difference in the human arena. And Admetus follows them in his own way.

[42] There can be no doubt that he thinks he learns something, since he says so, but exactly what it is that he learns is in doubt. Is too much emphasis placed on his ἄρτι μανθάνω? Perhaps, but the whole thrust of his scene of homecoming is that he realizes that his life is empty, whether or not he ever actually comes to the conclusion that he should have died himself. Cf. Jones (1948, in Wilson 1968) pp. 60–63 on the "enlightening of Admetus"; Arrowsmith (1974) 11; Rosenmeyer 240–2; on the other side see Beye (1959) 121 and in between ("not enough") Segal (1992):142.

and the man is something of an unobservant (almost intrusive) bystander. After his wife's death, Admetus begins to notice things about this space quite clearly from her perspective.[43]

Admetus does not really have much choice in the field of action.[44] It is hardly a heroic choice either.[45] The opportunity to show spunk by facing death with heroic equanimity or with knowing and self-authenticating courage is not open to him (or, to put it another way, in his "culturally over-determined structure of seeing" he does not find it so) as a man dying of natural causes. Nobody notices. He would have been like the chorus' relative's only son (to whom they refer in the *kommos*, 903–910), gone but soon forgotten.

We are not, furthermore, led to believe that Admetus saw himself as having a choice.[46] He is not described in the text as having gone through agonies of self-doubt before making the rounds of his nearest and dearest. The opportunity to not die was presented to him. Of course he took it.[47]

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[43] See Luschnig (1992) "Interiors":32–4 and (1992) "Confusions":25–7.

[44] If he ever had any choice it was either to remain alive by finding a surrogate or to die at *his* appointed time, not a human choice, since mortals are not in fact privy to this information and so cannot escape their appointed time which is, as a rule, subsequent to the gift of Prometheus, only known after the fact or very shortly before it. See Justina Gregory (1979):261.

[45] For Admetus (unlike Alcestis, Antigone, Andromache, Menoeceus, etc.) is not offered the option of dying nobly for a cause outside himself; he is simply going to die, as everyone does in the normal course of events. Of course Iphigenia is not offered the choice of dying nobly either, but she takes it anyway. In the *Antigone*, of the sisters, only Antigone sees that there is a choice, the choice to do the right thing and die for it if need be. Admetus is more like Ismene here: he chooses (once a choice has been presented to him) the more comfortable possibility until he sees that after all it is not comfortable any more. *Tragic* persons are often creative in seeing a choice (another possibility when there really is only one) and then seeing that as the only choice where a lesser mortal would not. We are not told why Admetus was going to die so soon. Perhaps that is the point. People die at different ages as Death says early on. Admetus is being rewarded by this ambivalent gift of the god, not punished by an early death.

[46] No more than Antigone does once she sees her duty. Although her sister is shocked by Antigone's choice to have a choice because she thought they had no choice.

[47] Admetus' "fate" had been like the two choices of Achilles minus their positive aspects: to be short-lived and to die without glory, what Achilles and his mother see as the tragedy that results from his ill treatment by Agamemnon: Achilles will not even have the undying honor. Admetus' fate includes no such choice: he only gets the choice between life and death: how great a thing this is is one of the things the play is about. Admetus' choice of life in the end becomes good and glorious; but in the meantime he must question it and even reject it. On the original acceptance see Lloyd-Jones' disturbing remarks (1990):199.

Like many Euripidean agonists (proto- or deutero-), especially male ones (one thinks of Jason, Orestes in the *Electra*, Agamemnon in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Pentheus, even Heracles in the play that bears his name), the Admetus represented in the play is out of his element in the world of myth. He experiences a series of "mythic confusions" in which he tries to put himself into a number of traditional stories which really are not quite parallel to his own story. He even reveals some anomalies of gender identification as he strives to make sense of his situation by resorting to characters and scenes that are well known to the audience.[48]

As much as the position of Admetus, known to be the man who allowed his wife to die for him, may offend the modern sensibility, the play is well along before he is even indirectly criticized by any other character, and it is later still before he is criticized by any *male* character.[49] Admetus is not even depicted as an ex-hero with a past, however dubious, to give substance to his life (a Jason in Corinth or a Theseus in Trozen) as he could have been. Euripides deliberately changes the story, both events and timing, in order, I believe, to give Alcestis a fuller life and role and to diminish Admetus until he is ready to be real. The past he talks about is his wedding day: that to him is as significant as the beautiful ship Argo is to Jason at the final crisis.

All action has reference to the house, something that is not true of every Greek drama, where spatial relations can be fairly fluid.[50] The situation at the beginning of the play stresses the institutional nature of the *oikos* because it was at some time in the past thought acceptable that an individual member be sacrificed to it and for its master, who will also one day die).[51] This may be typical of Greek attitudes to the *oikos*.[52] The House of Admetus and Alcestis is treated almost

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[48] See Garner (1988) on the linking of Alcestis with Homeric heroes, especially Patroclus and Hector. See also Segal (1992):145. Whether the audience would feel any chronological difficulty with Admetus' mythological forays is doubtful. When he projects himself into stories that have not yet happened according to ancient traditions of mythological chronology he is never explicit. Of these references to other stories some are more clear and detailed than others.

[49] Avoiding the obvious may well be a theme of the play or one of a number of strategies that postpone facing the facts.

[50] See Arnott (1989), chapter 5.

[51] Apollo does, after all, speak of preserving the *oikos*, not just saving Admetus' life. This fact should be remembered when we consider Alcestis' motives for giving up her life.

[52] Or of our attitudes to their attitudes; cf. Wesley E. Thompson, "Athenian

as if it were one of the characters.[53] It develops as characters do: that is to say, our knowledge of it develops as we are treated to interior views of the *oikos* behind the *skēnē*, so that its prominence is felt as both a physical and ethical structure.[54] Paradoxically it is the medium through which the gender polarity is both established and broken down. At the time when (after the funeral) it seems most broken and desolate, we are reminded of a happier time in its past, in fact of its beginning as the house of Admetus and Alcestis, at the time of their wedding when this particular *oikos* was constituted.[55]

3. *Prologue and Parodos*

Prologue and Plot

The movement from generic to individual back to generic is established in the prologue. The story is told of Admetus' rounds of his φίλοι (15) from whom the woman/his wife is particularized (17) but only by the most generic word, γυνή. Then she is at once referred to in the generalizing masculine,[56] ὅστις (17), θανών (18), even though her identity is known. In line 19 she is given back her gender when her

Marriage Patterns: Remarriage," *CSCA* 5 (1972):223, "scholars tend to emphasize the institutional rather than the personal aspects of Athenian marriage." The *Alcestis* itself should give these institutionalists some room to reconsider.

[53] Nearly everyone addresses it; it receives guests and does not *know* how to turn them away; a god served in it as a slave; it is the house of the king; therefore its continuation is even more vital—if that is possible—than would be that of an ordinary house. See among others W. Smith (1960):135–8 for a particularly good statement on the theme of the house in the play.

[54] In the same way, we know something about a character by seeing the mask, but little by little gain enough particulars about any focal character to see that he or she is the right person for the story in its particular manifestation. On "focal characters" see Heath (1987):90–100.

[55] Every house has its hearth and its shrines (conceptually at least). On actual classical houses see: Robin Osborne, "Buildings and Residence on the Land in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: The Contribution of Epigraphy," *BSA* 80 (1985):119–28; Michael Jameson, "Private Space and the Greek City," in Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (edd.), *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*, Oxford, 1990:171–195; Robin Osborne, *Demos: The Discovery of Classical Attika*, Cambridge, 1985:15–46; John Ellis Jones, "Town and Country Houses of Attica in Classical Times," in *Thorikos and the Laurion in Archaic and Classical Times* edited by H. Mussche, Paule Spitaels, F. Goemaere-De Poerck, Ghent, 1975:63–140.

[56] See Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York (Schocken), 1975: 99–102 on the use of masculine pronouns to refer to the heroine in *Antigone*.

actual person and activities are described and thus given a three-dimensionality, a solidity and substance: she must be supported to walk about in the house; she is breathing her last breaths. That Apollo is still being more general than particular in his narrative becomes clearer when we have heard the servant describe in detail what is going on under the roof Apollo has just left. There is a growing particularization of Alcestis which begins to fade immediately after her death but burgeons again after her funeral.[57]

Apollo describes Alcestis not as she is in the maid's narrative, but as she is the instant before she appears on stage. In the longer account, Alcestis—though she is said to be failing by the end of it (143, 203–4)—is described as moving about from place to place (like the Alcestis of her husband's imaginary dreams, 354–6, being reanimated and re-enlivening those same places that she is felt to have left behind) with some vigor (160–3, 170–6, 183–95). Her servant will repeat (143) the verb Apollo uses here, ψυχορραγεῖν (20), to describe her mistress's last breaths and to make explicit the contrast in reactions to Alcestis' life and death between the lofty Olympian and the lowly (but self-assured and fearless) servant. It is this failing breath, apparently, that has frightened Apollo out of the house, the μίασμα (22) of a dying gasp,[58] though fear of pollution does not deter those who love her from being near. Alcestis will soon follow him out of the halls, for other reasons: to see the sun and be seen for the last time (as the servant says, 208 πανύστατον).[59] She is to be seen for the first and presumably last time by the audience, without whose witness her death would be less remarkable and less believable. She asks, too, to be *heard* before witnesses (281, 371–3) and makes the children witnesses to their father's promise. Her self-consciousness,

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[57] A similar thing happens to Phaedra after her death when she becomes an ideal wife in her husband's eyes, far from the unique and imperfect person she had been, but exactly as she wanted to be seen and, with the moral and rational part of herself, to be. The sharp and painfully humiliating contrast between this pallid illusion of the "unhappy Cretan girl" and the reality of her suffering, passion, intellect, and disgrace suggests that indeed she does not achieve her heroic goal and certainly not her socially sensible aim.

[58] We see this quite clearly in *Hippolytus* when Artemis leaves her lofty perch in order to avoid sharing the stage with the dying youth. (Aphrodite had done the same earlier in the play, but she never claimed to love him.) In this play her brother leaves the house because death/Death is about to enter it.

[59] If she does not actually ask the elements to look at her sufferings, at least Admetus believes that to be the purpose of her invocation to the sun et al. (246–7).

like that of many tragic doers and sufferers from Clytemnestra to Iphigenia, is palpable (see esp. 323–5).

Apollo treats only the end of the scene he has left behind. The perfection of Alcestis, her death and the loss the others feel because of it (filled in by the next two scenes), after all, diminish his boon to the house.[60] He is hardly concerned with Alcestis *per se*.[61]

In the dialogue with Death, Alcestis is named for the first time (52), but the name is only to be replaced by a rather generic, almost genetic, discussion (including a number of generalizing masculine singular and plural nouns, adjectives, and participles, 49, 50, 55) that takes in a divine view of the human conditions of aging and economic circumstances. It appears that Death is on somewhat more intimate terms with the mortal condition than Apollo[62] as indicated by his familiarity with certain sordid details like youth and aging and wealth or its absence. At last Alcestis is mentioned again (69) as the object to be rescued by Heracles; earlier she had been the object given in exchange by Admetus (46). Death, at least, makes her the subject (73) of her projected last verb, the usual last human action: "the woman will go down to the halls of Hades," but this speaker, too, ends with the generalizing (one might say ungendered) masculine when he refers to the ritual that will dedicate her to the powers below.

Nobody is much fleshed out in the prologue, not even the unearthly participants. The story is told and Apollo's part in it, with emphasis on why the gods are concerned in this mortal affair, on the ineluctable nature of Death, on the distancing of Apollo from

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[60] The house he has been preserving (9) is said to have died with Alcestis (415), for example.

[61] In the "rhetorical situation" Apollo is the stand-in for Admetus: the one to whom the uncomfortable, disconcerting, or tragic truth is communicated. There are two beginnings of the male drama, each with its separate background. Apollo and Admetus have similar roles at each of these beginnings. Apollo asks the unthinkable perhaps without the deadly earnestness of his protegé and gets it: Admetus' fate is in remission. Admetus asks the unthinkable and gets it, but not from the quarter where it is expected. Apollo had tricked the fates and is tricked in return: his success is conditional. Admetus is tricked too: his success is abject failure. Edward M. Bradley talks about Admetus' "fall into victory" in his excellent article (1980):112–127. Apollo tries to get Death to relent and when his request is denied he threatens Death. Admetus tries inanely to get Alcestis to relent, but after she dies he threatens and rejects his father.

[62] Apollo is usually able to choose the human beings he will associate with and in this unique circumstance he was lucky in having Admetus—whom he refers to as his ξένος—as his master in the divine crime and punishment story with which he opens his narrative.

the dying, and on the generic mortal condition. The egalitarianism of Death does little to counterbalance the male perspective given to the scene by Apollo's friendship[63] for the aristocratic Admetus and his less than energetic attempt to save Alcestis. He does not make the same extraordinary effort to save Alcestis as he does to save Admetus. Death is concerned that he get some body. He does not particularly care whose. In the human drama, whose death this is will be of great concern to audience and characters. A generic death is not tragic; it is not even a meaningful combination of words.

The Death of Admetus

We see the result of the bargain with death (as is common in tragedy and indeed in epic, we are given the situation at or near its end). The actual making of the bargain is, therefore, but only in the most literal sense, outside the play: for surely the play is more complex than its plot. That is, it includes more than the unidirectional text. The aftermath of the agreement is, of course, the given situation.[64] We are, in any case, invited to think about the making of the agreement in a number of passages. The first comes, briefly, in Apollo's narrative of refusal and acceptance and then more fully in the one scene between Admetus and Alcestis in which the wife makes clear the conditions of her acceptance, adding what appears to be a last minute condition. Later, in the scene between Pheres and Admetus the father confirms his denial and Admetus makes brutally clear the terms under which he expected his father to accept and announces the consequences of the old man's refusal.

It is related in Apollo's brief narrative that Admetus made the rounds of his φίλοι (of which, I agree with Dale, we are given a

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[63] Both Admetus and Apollo are called ὅσιος (though surely this word applied to a god needs some explanation). Indeed it gets some explanation in the scholia (*ad loc.*). The scholiast suggests that we must supply a word meaning "servant" or "hired hand." That is, as Dale writes, in using ὅσιος here Apollo must be referring to his own human manifestation, which he is shedding as he leaves the house. For, she points out, the word is rarely used of gods. But even though Apollo uses it with a verb in the past there is something odd, something not quite satisfying about the explanation. The god talks about himself as a religious human being, but only after first assuring us that he is not a human being at all. Something of the ὁσιότης of his human manifestation still sticks to him in his memory of his days as a human being.

[64] See Lloyd (1985), esp. 129.

complete list)[65] trying to find a volunteer.[66] His reaction to his wife's death in the second episode, seen by so many critics as either ironic or in bad taste,[67] may be taken as a kind of flashback to that original scene in which her unexpected offer to die is made and it is apparently an offer that cannot be refused.[68] The death of Admetus has mechanically become the death of Alcestis and cannot be reclaimed.[69] The unthinkable act was suggesting that his parents' lives were less valuable than his own.[70] His choices become limited. More limitations are added with Alcestis' request that he not remarry and with his own promises not to have fun. His father is reproached and both parents are hated for not agreeing to give their lives for their son. But Euripides is not Admetus. He does not hate Pheres. He created him for the expression of a certain point of view and for bringing out aspects of Admetus, Alcestis, and Heracles and their relation to

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[65] See Dale (1954) *ad* 16-17 and Stanton (1990):42–46 on the list of Admetus' friends. Stanton believes that the three named in the list are not enough. As Dale says for the benefit of those who want to rob us of this line, it is important that we know early on that his parents refused. The vague phrasing of the lines leaves us in doubt as to whether he asked Alcestis or not.

[66] But of exactly how the subject was broached there is not a clue, that being rather the stuff of comedy (or satyr play, like Apollo's deception of the fates and the wining and dining of Heracles). Did he merely bring it up at a family gathering, fully expecting one of his parents to accept death in his place, only to have them both refuse and his wife accept unbidden and unexpectedly? Or did he go to them one by one?

[67] Beye (1959):121, for example, calls Admetus' lament "savagely ironic"; cf. Barnes (1964–5, in Wilson 1968:28).

[68] As with the three curses of Theseus in the *Hippolytus*. Even if Theseus had "unsaid his curse" as the chorus begs him to do, it is doubtful that it would have been efficacious. No one has offered to save Alcestis from death or given her the opportunity of looking for a surrogate. Cf. Rosenmeyer (1963):222 and Burnett (1965):241.

[69] So when Barnes (1964–5 in Wilson 1968):28 says that Admetus could save his wife "by the simple act of refusing her sacrifice," this is not so clear. Folktales are often exceedingly mechanistic. This is what gives them their charm, their humor, and their moral as well as the grim predictability that things will turn out according to pattern. Tragedy, though somewhat restricted by the known facts of the myth, is more free. For Admetus does in fact beg Alcestis to take him with her, not seeing that if he had not tried to postpone "going" in the first place, she would not have to go now. This is not to say that his carrying on is not ironic or tasteless in its new place where it is unquestionably out of place (but not unnatural). That is, once Admetus accepts Apollo's condition, which he does when he asks his parents to die for him, it is not clear that he could refuse the sacrifice of his wife.

[70] It is not impossible—in fact it is likely—that the only way he could have refused the bargain was by not asking *anyone* to die for him in the first place. That is enough to characterize him at the beginning of the story, before we know anything of the man behind the mask: it was the unthinking act of an unthinking man, the shell of the man who is Admetus.

death. If he wants us to ask the question, what kind of people would agree to or refuse such a bargain, he also insists that we suspend our judgment until this question is no longer relevant or even particularly interesting.

What details can be squeezed out of Apollo's few words about the causes, remote and immediate of the present *kairos*? The god begins by establishing a pattern of violence in which he introduces himself through his relationships.[71] In setting down the remote causes, he imposes on our human domestic drama an exceedingly violent and vengeful history of divine interfamilial feuding which established (whether beyond recall or still in transition remains to be seen) the human modality: Asclepius who raised men from the dead or who made men immortal is dead and so men and, of course, women, too, now die permanently.[72] The order of words (in 5–6) with the doubling of the direct object (the objects of Apollo's murderous rage) shows that he is still angry over the death of his son and frustrated over his inability to do anything about it (as he says to Thanatos, "I am upset when my friends suffer," 42). Asclepius had offered hope: the hopelessness of the current state of affairs comes through in the adjective θνητῷ (7) expressive of the human modality and referring to Admetus, not yet named in his own right (but only in the adjectival form referring to his physical house). Admetus (like Apollo) sees his father as responsible (αἴτιος) for his sufferings (for Alcestis' death, as Zeus was for Asclepius').[73] But Admetus is wrong.

Admetus is a mortal (θνητῷ, 7) and Apollo rescued him from death (11) through craft or deceit; but we should not be taken in by this one instance of an artful (rather than violent) Apollo. After all he is carrying the bow (not the lyre, but equally ineffectual as a weapon against Death/death)[74] and he has just given a tale of intergenerational

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[71] His father is Zeus, but his son Asclepius identifies him out of the many sons of Zeus, as does his servitude to the mortal man Admetus.

[72] Ella Schwartz, *Aspects of Orpheus in Classical Literature and Mythology*, Harvard dissertation, 1984, points out "From the very beginning of the prologue Apollo has made it clear that resurrection is not a possibility." Well, yes and no. The cosmic order was just fixed by Zeus in killing Asclepius perhaps a year or so ago, but perhaps in this lighter-hearted play we are treated to the story of a man and woman who slipped through the cracks before the cosmic order/human modality was *really* established once for all. It is now of course. After all, Apollo claims to be capable of seeing to a minor adjustment himself in his "saving" of Admetus.

[73] See Thury (1988):209–11 on the relation of these mythological generational conflicts to the rest of the play.

[74] More so, in fact, because Thanatos can be given a line that asks about it, for the purpose of being informed that it is only a prop.

slaughter in which the greater gods use lesser divinities as targets. So far so good for Admetus (if not for the Cyclopes or Asclepius). Unfortunately there are footnotes. First, it was not death that Apollo rescued his friend from, but only immediate (παραυτίκ', 13) death. No question of *his* making men immortal! And then there is the question of the surrogate. Apparently in the old days Asclepius could just raise men up (v. the scholia *ad* 1 for a list) as a free gift. Life has become harder (and more precious) for mortal men and women. Ἄλλον . . . νεκρόν ("another . . . body" 14): the postponement of the last word shows reluctance on Apollo's part to utter the fatal syllables, but the other person has got to *die*.

In some ways, then, the scene in which Alcestis tells her husband what he must do is anachronistic,[75] as is the scene between father and son which in fact belongs to an even earlier part of the story.[76] Successive scenes, then, show us different layers of the past in reverse order: acceptance by Alcestis, request, refusal, and blame of the parents, entertainment of the guest.[77] Viewed in this way, the play does treat, if not the actual agreement between Admetus and Alcestis, at least some of the emotions that belong to the beginning of the story. For it is far from clear whether Admetus had any choice in the crucial acceptance of her death.[78] However, certain attitudes of Admetus, implicit in his words and actions (especially those to his father), do make it fairly clear that he was not reluctant to accept the outrageous bargain at least as long as he had reason to think one of his parents would die for him. He was not altogether passive in enduring that particular gift of the god.

Even the god of light and truth cannot see or foresee the consequences in human terms of the substitution he arranges,[79] until the event is about to occur and he attempts his eleventh hour persuasion of Death: things are simpler on the divine plane than on the mortal.

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[75] That is, like several scenes in the first few books of the *Iliad*, it really belongs to an earlier part of the story; in this case, when Alcestis first made the agreement.

[76] This is what could have happened when Admetus was making the rounds of his family. For this interpretation, see Lloyd (1985):119–131.

[77] This last is more complicated in that it surrounds and goes beyond the refusal scene.

[78] Once someone had agreed to die for him, did he have the right to refuse? As the chorus says at a later point it is necessary to endure the gift of the god (1071, to what gift and to what god they are referring is ambiguous).

[79] For a more positive view of Apollo's role see Kilpatrick (1986):5.

Apollo can threaten, but not persuade (cf. his role in the *Eumenides*).[80] Similarly Admetus puts out of his mind the reality of death and parting until his wife is dying before his eyes. Death does not pay any attention to Apollo's words. Admetus threatens his father with disowning (a sort of ironical disinheritance of the father by the son, made all the more ironical by Admetus' renunciation of legitimacy and even freeborn status).[81] But Admetus, unlike his divine counterpart, does not carry out his threat even vicariously.

Death, like all abstractions, is one-dimensional and single-minded. He will have his due and cannot really be or do otherwise. His part in the prologue is the first of a series of actions (largely in the form of debates) dealing with life and death. All the other scenes are variations of the prologue with its informative monologue and agonistic dialogue, which establishes the structure of the rest of the play. Thus, here, we have the god's narration followed by his futile attempt to persuade Death not to take Alcestis. The play offers an alternation of one and two person scenes, resolved at the end in its (seemingly) three person scene with its subtle shifting among three different couples that turns out really to be a two-person scene, with the right couple finally sorted out and entering the house.

Throughout the prologue death and resurrection are treated: but death prevails.[82] Asclepius is mentioned at the beginning, but he is dead. In his place, near the end of the scene an unnamed but clearly identified guest is declared to be a future savior. The background to the story has been told, not from its very beginning—we are never told, for example about the wooing of Alcestis, nor why Admetus was going to die at this time—but from the beginning of Apollo's part in it, which began in another story altogether. The first causes offered are the first causes of Apollo's relations with this house. Through a variety of twists, Admetus was rescued. Apollo tricked the fates, exercising not βία (force) but τέχνη (skill, art). Hope is kept alive only in word, through references to Asclepius (which is a parallel story) and in Apollo's attempt to persuade Death, but until Apollo's prophecy, the absence of hope is stressed in the face of the literal living presence of death. Hope should disappear altogether after

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[80] On Apollo in this play and Eumenides, see Rachel Aélion (1983):132–6 and Peter Riemer (1989):14–19.

[81] See Thury (1988):205.

[82] As Dale (1954:55) says the dialogue allows Apollo to depart with dignity, but though he promises a happy ending he leaves Death in possession of the field.

Alcestis dies at the very latest, but strangely it does not. The hope represented by Asclepius is taken away because he is dead, but the fact that there was once somebody who could raise the dead does prepare the way for another who will do it, using not drugs or craft, but brute force. The death of Asclepius in an oblique way has brought about Apollo's involvement with the house of Admetus, leading to his favoring Admetus and thus to Alcestis' death. Apollo sees the story (insofar as it affects Admetus) as taking place between two acts of hospitality: first, his own reception by Admetus and his own service to the house and then Admetus' receiving of Heracles and the latter's service to the house.[83] This parallel is confirmed by the chorus when they sing of Apollo's visitation immediately after Heracles has been ushered into the house. Both god and mortal perform miraculous rescues, though Heracles' is more marvelous, being after the fact and (apparently) not causing any other deaths, a feat beyond the divine Apollo's imagination or power. The mortal Heracles' benefaction parallels Apollo's, but is unconditional. For both the god and the man, the service to the house of Admetus is set within a larger framework in the life of each: part of the story of Apollo's grief for the loss of his son, a *parergon* between two labors of Heracles. This is, I believe, the reason Euripides added the seemingly irrelevant details of where the guest is heading to Apollo's prophesy of rescue by Heracles. The story we are seeing is central, but only to the lives of Admetus and Alcestis. The rescue hinges on the contingencies of time and place. It is only a small part of the stories of Heracles' labors (and his slow but sure elimination of the sons of Ares) and of Apollo's dispute with his father (and the establishment of the mortal mode). Apollo's prophecy ends his connection with the house of Admetus. Heracles' refusal to stay and celebrate with the newly reunited couple and his need for haste to his next labor is another device for showing that the story is crucial only to its chief actors. If it is a universal story, it is so because of its particular relevance to the lives of one couple. The generalizing tag lines at the end announce the same message. Not only could they be attached to any number of stories, they are attached to four quite different stories. The particularity of the story has been stressed throughout, beginning with the emphasis

[83] Does he have a causal relationship to the coming of Heracles, or does he simply know about it? Is the coming of Heracles related to the coming of Apollo only through Admetus' hospitality to both?

on what is inside this house, the imaginary but particularized space, behind the *skēnē* and the importance of *this* day in the life of its family members. Serious themes for so delicate a play.

The prologue, in sum, presents the play from the divine point of view. Apollo and Death are two nearly disinterested parties. Though Apollo loves the house and the man, his ξένος, he has little understanding of what death means to mortals and he is leaving the scene, to avoid the pollution of death. Death, the democratic bogeyman, cares little who dies, provided that somebody does. His tone is somewhat accusatory. But his implication that Admetus "should" be dead is more practical than moral or even modal. Death has the last word in the debate and despite Apollo's solemn prophecy, death seems final. It is interesting that both enter armed, Apollo with his bow, Death with a sword. Apollo's weapon is only a prop, no doubt the elegant bow of vase painting, part of the iconography of Apollo as he himself more or less admits (40). Euripides is here wittily calling attention to conventions of costuming. Death's weapon is effectual. Of course the egalitarian and voracious nature of death is a given. Death is owed by all (mortals, 782, 418–19; cf. 682). We live for one life (722). Being mortal we must think mortal thoughts (800). This is the general scheme, the human modality, so general that it is a cliché. But *timing* makes it particular: *her* death, not *his*. Timing[84] is important from the beginning. The word παραυτίκα (13) is a key here: Admetus, though it may not occur to him to think about it, has not escaped the mortal mode; what he has escaped is his immediate demise and he does come to long for death and regret that he has postponed it. Alcestis is dying (Apollo tells us), dying (the maid describes her and then we see her in death's throes), dead (the child sings hovering at her mouth while the actor, not dead at all, of course, sings his part). These are the particulars: Alcestis has taken Admetus' immediate death for him ("right now," she says, αὐτίκ' 322). One of the "givens" has been taken away, if only temporarily.

They make their separate exits, Apollo away from the house—his entrance having been an exit from the house—and back to what is for him the real world. Death's exit is an entrance into the house

[84] The focus on timing is underscored by the accumulation of words having to do with time in Apollo's speech: ἐς τόδ' ἡμέρας, 9; παραυτίκ', 13; νῦν, 19; τῇδε . . . ἐν ἡμέρᾳ, 20; ἤδη, 24; συμμέτρως, 26; τόδ' ἦμαρ, 27. This is matched by the accumulation of words referring to the house: the scene inside the house is activated at 19–20. We are informed of what is happening in the story right now.

where the real drama is taking place, hidden from us. That action is hidden and yet as familiar as what goes on between the walls of anyone's house. The entrance of Death means that the hidden space (the dead end)[85] is to be the site of dark and mysterious rituals. Death will cut Alcestis' hair, making her at once the sacrificial victim and her own chief mourner. Oddly then the next messenger from the house tells of mundane and yet special doings. Death is not defeated, but he is put off. And then it turns out that the action does not after all take place inside the imaginary space so that it can be reported to us, but it happens right in front of our eyes, in a self-conscious reversal of the usual tragic practice. The messenger from the house reports preparations which help to make the death scene dramatic and which tells us what to look for in it.

Death is always there. His presence is felt in the word θνητῷ (7) the generic and modal word for human beings. *Whose* death it is to be is a matter of the exact moment. Later Admetus tries to generalize this by saying "those about to die are dead" (527), but it does not work. Until that fatal moment (until the κύριον ἦμαρ, 105) life and death are two separate things. With the entrance of Death Alcestis' part in the story is becoming more prominent because he has come for her. Attempts to make this someone else's story are failing. The timing of the particular event is the theme of the parodos.

Parodos

The chorus, before moving to the catalogue of funeral νόμοι gives the first unequivocal statement of Alcestis' human, uxorial perfection (80–85):

> Is the queen dead and must I mourn for her or
> is Alcestis still alive, the daughter of Pelias?
> She is the best wife to her husband
> the best there has ever been. I think so.
> So does everybody.

After this, she is generalized as the good wife (97), and made one of the company of the good who are being hurt and therefore worthy of mourning from the good (109–111). Here at least we are given a

[85] Padel (in Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990):343 speaks of the "cul de sac" behind the stage door.

clue as to where the struggle will be in the play. The male perspective (Apollo's perspective) is maintained: the chorus has come to the palace out of friendship for Admetus.[86] They reflect *his* point of view. They pity *his* suffering. They see Alcestis' value in reference to her husband. Alcestis is the one to be admired, but admired at a distance. It is almost as if she were already a shrine. We feel the distancing from the dying and the perfect. Admetus is to be pitied: pity is a more intimate and knowing emotion.

The singers alternate between hope[87] and despair. But what robs them of real hope is knowledge.[88] The whole city knows that today is the fated day (156). And we have actually seen Death enter the house.[89] The exterior of the house is still prominent, with the chorus' minute examination of it for traces of mourning. They also listen closely for sounds from within, the private noise of women's hands beating, before turning farther afield with references to Lycia and Egypt[90] and even farther when they sing of Asclepius dead and Alcestis gone to Hades (prematurely, if only by minutes, 124–6). They picture her as gone only so that they can wish her back. The connection between Alcestis and Asclepius is a complicated one, mirrored

[86] They frequently represent the masculine perspective, as Rosenmeyer (1963):219 and Scully (1986):137 point out. Like the chorus in *Agamemnon* they are not averse to criticizing their sovereign, but, though their style of address shifts from sympathy to pity to censure to fatherly advice, they are unmistakably on Admetus' side throughout while at the same time displaying admiration for his wife, a difference needless to say from the less positive feelings of the old men in Aeschylus' drama. Both choruses we might say are awed by the ruler's wife as being somehow more than human.

[87] Hope (90–2, 122–31) is present in their words, but it is so slight and concerns so minuscule a duration of time that it becomes its opposite (112–121, 135).

[88] See Gregory (1979):261 on the possible reference here to the "blind hope" of *Prometheus*, 248.

[89] This is how the knowledge is communicated to us: it does not add anything the chorus does not already know. In what way they have found out we are not told. Where we do have the advantage is in the knowledge of the savior who will come. What seems to us so odd about all this is that everyone knows of the sacrifice and everyone accepts it without any criticism of Admetus. Does this mean that his acceptance is viewed as acceptable or is there some irony in everyone's avoiding the obvious? When he *is* criticized, it is not for accepting the bargain, but for various other improprieties (that is, until his father is so provoked that he calls his son a murderer). Either everyone else avoids the obvious or no one is made to notice it because it is not yet interesting. Similarly both Admetus and the chorus avoid saying what is most on their minds when Heracles arrives, that Alcestis is dead. Can these omissions be part of the parody? Doubtless they are part of the magic of the play, of things that seem clearly one thing becoming quite clearly their opposites.

[90] See Beye (1974):66 (*ad* 113), "The distance of the sites from the scene of the play indicates the extravagance of the CHORUS' mood."

by the complex syntax in the second antistrophe. The story of Alcestis is here surrounded and overwhelmed by that of Asclepius of which it had already been made a part by the words of Apollo in his chronology of his relationship to the house of Admetus.[91]

The chorus at the gates is a nice variation on the stage device that we see in some other plays where the chorus or characters filter sounds from the house to the audience. Usually the purpose of this device is to communicate information to the audience, but this time there is nothing to hear and nothing to tell. This lack of revelation emphasizes the fact that the house is little more than a shell until it is animated by details such as those given by the two servants *and* it stresses the timing of the events, the previous departure of Apollo and arrival of Death, the present arrival of the chorus. Nothing has happened yet. From the sound of silence in front of the house the chorus moves to the individuals of the *oikos*, bringing Alcestis into prominence beginning at line 81. With its questions (perhaps imitating Death's series of nervous queries and complaints), the chorus activates the witness theme. The witness theme always involves the audience whose intellectual role is shown in this way.[92]

After their flight to other sites as far afield as Hades' halls, the chorus returns home to the altars in front of Admetus' house (132–135, bracketed by Diggle). All the altars are flowing with the blood of sacrifice.[93]

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[91] Their story is part of two other stories which come at the beginning and end of the prologue and the beginning and end of the play. The house, however, entered by Death at the end of the prologue, entered by Alcestis and Admetus at the end of the play, enlivened little by little throughout, provides the focus for the audience. Although first Alcestis and then Admetus is the focal character, both together form the *oikos*. Only at the very end is their equality reestablished and the *oikos* reconstituted, like that of Odysseus and Penelope.

[92] Here we share ignorance with the chorus because we do not know whether Alcestis is alive or dead and yet like the chorus but from a different source we do know that the end is very near. The chorus lets us know that they know too, making our roles similar. When the maid says the whole πόλις knows (156), she includes the chorus and us in that shared knowledge. This knowledge is used to explain their presence, but it had to be introduced somehow. The questions continue. The sounds not heard from within give us information and engage our imaginations on the interior of the house, on people in the house. The actual or to be imagined sounds which will be heard after the death are anticipated here.

[93] Are we being reminded of Clytemnestra's sacrifices in the *Agamemnon*, sacrifices which also provide no cure (any more than Priam's had done)? The twist is that Clytemnesta's sacrifices were performed to ensure not the life but the death of her spouse.

4. *First Episode and First Stasimon*

After all the talk about death we might have expected the servant, who now enters in tears, to tell us the sad news that her mistress is dead, but once again the inevitable is postponed. Here in the first episode, Alcestis is being brought to life and kept alive by art, by the artistic description given by her maid. She achieves an identity as perfect wife and mother, by first playing her roles in the house (in this narrative) and then dying for the house, but the resurrection will bring back the incompleteness and chaos of life. We are here treated to a glimpse of her life and attitudes before she dies. In the play's time both she and Admetus gain, not complete, but more rounded selves.

The servant's part in the first episode sets the stage for Alcestis' heroic deeds of the second episode. She describes her mistress' activities, beginning with the most personal. Is Alcestis like a dying philosopher? The calm acceptance of death is a feature she shares with Socrates and others; but Alcestis gives no evidence of an eschatology other than the mythical, murky landscape of Hades, which she does not welcome either as a release or as a better world, for she is made to love her life, though not in the tenacious way Pheres loves his. Or is she, equally, like an epic warrior arming for battle, being built and adorned by the poet for great feats to come.[94] We are invited to participate in the creation of this work of the imagination: of course there *is* no Alcestis until her entrance (244). The maid's speech pulls us inside behind the doors of the *skene*. Like Homeric descriptions of the warrior preparing for battle, the narrative of Alcestis dressing and preparing for death activates our imaginations. With the actor telling the order of events, we create an Alcestis in our mind's eye. *We* see that she has done the things we are told she has done. *We* participate in making her a woman by imagining her putting on the appropriate costume.[95] This participation continues as we see her struggle with death and are invited into her mind.[96]

[94] Apart from the superiority the dying are shown to assume over the living, the *competitive* virtues are perhaps less in evidence in the philosopher's death than they are here and so we might see her more as a hero preparing for the ordeal, but in a setting more suitable to a bride than a fighter. For Patroclus as the model for Alcestis, see Richard Garner (1988):58–71.

[95] Cf. Bassi (1989):25.

[96] See Padel (in Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990) especially 358–9.

First we are drawn inside the unseen interior of the house and then we are wrenched into the mimed terror of the grip of the unseen monster. A little later we will share Admetus' creative vision, the commissioning of a statue, the dreams, his projected death and life after death.

Through the servant's words we are persuaded to look at Alcestis as the "best" and that not in a vacuum, but in comparison with others. The chorus (150–1) may mean to say that their king's wife is of fair fame and the best of wives in a more abstract, general, way, without any actual comparison in mind, but the servant is more literal-minded. When she says "best" she pictures others in the competition (152–5). The fact that Alcestis is inimitable because she is dying for her husband is known to the whole city. The chorus does react to the words of the maid, realizing, perhaps, that their more abstract way of looking at Alcestis was not good enough (at 241–3 for example, they realize that the loss of her will make Admetus' life unlivable). They show their growing admiration in a more personal way later when they wish they could have a wife just like her (473–5). This makes it clear that there has been a movement from the general to the particular, from the abstract "best" to the personally desirable. This focusing in upon the particular woman happens twice in the play: there are two recognitions of who Alcestis is, the one here near the beginning is narrative and ethical, the other at the very end dramatic and literal. Only Admetus can have a wife just like Alcestis: only to him is it granted both to know his wife's unique value (made known through her sacrifice) and to be able finally and unexpectedly to keep her with him.

In addition to the general knowledge shared by the πόλις, the servant has special knowledge from the οἶκος to communicate to the chorus, details, she says, that will amaze her hearers. Her mistress' perfection needs details to be memorable and individuating. For one thing, its pictorial nature, the immanent physical perfection of this woman is made known. It is clear that the maid realizes that she is describing something beautiful and perfect, a work of art. And for another, the social perfection of Alcestis within her sphere, at the hearth and altars (the interior religion of the wife), with her children and servants is revealed. The maid describes (brings out of doors)[97]

[97] Cf. Hippolytus' accusation of female servants to Phaedra's nurse (650). Here of course it is her mistress's nobility that the servant is exposing, but the publicity itself may be a kind of transgression.

even more intimate matters as she dwells on the female and interior aspects of family life, changing the point of view, beginning to mark the conversion to the female perspective that takes over the play or at least balances the male. For surely it is noteworthy that the maid does not make much mention of Admetus himself as a person rather than as a relationship.[98] He is mentioned at line 149 by his relational title, πόσις.

> κόσμος γ' ἕτοιμος, ᾧ σφε συνθάψει πόσις.
> The attire is ready with which her husband will bury her.

As the last word in the line and sentence, the position of the word and the fact that it is the subject carrying out an action after the death of Alcestis makes him quite obviously the *survivor*, but also something of an outsider. Πόσιν is the first word in line 155 and here he becomes more involved, as the object encircled by words referring to his wife and her actions and to her love or esteem for him or subordination to him. But the very coziness of the syntax intimates the falsity of the premise. For he will be left alone and lonely, bereft of his wife's loving embrace and having to face only her death-for-him (ὑπερθανεῖν, the last word in line 155). Again in the reported speech he is mentioned twice as function (178, 180) in connection to the marriage bed, to which he is even subordinated in the arrangement of words (180).[99] Finally the maid calls him by name (196).[100]

The maid gives life to the unseen interior. As an eyewitness reporter she comes closest to Alcestis' own vision of herself, telling as narrator what Alcestis herself cannot tell, since Alcestis is saved for a more dramatic, less narrative, role. Alcestis has something to do on stage: she has to die. But first she has something to say, and it is not a story. Rather her words are first dramatic, a demonstration of a person in death's arms, and then effective (rather than affective like the maid's): her last will and testament—being not about property

[98] Twice the (male) chorus asks about him, once at the beginning and once at the end of the maid's long speech (145, 199) and the maid makes her less than flattering comments about him. Of course the major farewell scene is saved for the second episode, but could there not have been some mention of him by either of the women that is personal rather than institutional?

[99] For a different interpretation of the marriage bed scene as showing the alienation of the spouses, see Schwinge (1970):36–9.

[100] Where he is the ambiguous possessor of either (or both) οἶκοι or (and) κακά, who would be better off dead (197–8, a response to the chorus' exclamation at 144).

but about action—determines what will happen subsequently. Through her servant's eyes we see Alcestis somehow realizing that this is *the* day (ἡμέραν τὴν κυρίαν, 158: cf. 105, κύριον ἦμαρ and κύριος, 1140). Through her eyes we see Alcestis admiring her white skin as she washes it so that it can be seen and admired by the maid and then reported to the chorus and audience. The maid takes over the narcissistic role of the beautiful young woman seeing herself doing certain things (here, familiar things for the last time).[101] She is seen paying more notice to her fair skin, calling attention to its beauty and to the fact that it is unchanged, so that this can be reported (173–4). She chooses her clothing and accessories with more care. She dresses more becomingly (160–1) and with more attention to what she is doing because it is the last time and because she is watched. Alcestis is briefly, but fully, described as preparing for her role in the play, her exit from the house, her entrance onto the stage and so into the male sphere. Her actions in the "liminal" space at the palace door ultimately force her husband, if not fully into her sphere, at least into noticing her life and its importance to him and to herself. This event—her exit from the house—is given the significance accorded to rites of passage. She has been described almost as if she were a bride getting ready to meet her husband, to enter adult life. We, as audience, are being invited into the creative process. We play our several roles as we see the result of what the maid describes: we know we are watching a play and are being invited to reflect on what we see and at the same time we know (or pretend) that we are seeing real people doing real things in real time. Chief among our reflective duties at the moment is to notice that the two rituals (the wedding and the funeral) are being fused and confused.[102]

Alcestis enters—when she does finally enter—suitably attired for her final journey, in the theatrical clothing that we pretend she put on in the way the maid describes in the rooms of the imaginary

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[101] As compared to Phaedra in her vision of herself participating in unaccustomed activities: the interposition of the maid takes the place of the fantastical nature of Phaedra's cries as a kind of distancing mechanism from the event; in neither case do we have a character describing what she is actually doing.

[102] See on the ritual element, Rabinowitz (1993):93–7 who concludes that "The opposition of funeral and marriage, death and new life, failure and success, is only apparent, however" (50). Rehm (1994):84 takes a quite different approach from Rabinowitz, suggesting, "By conflating the two rituals, Euripides not only validates the roles of woman and wife as understood by his contemporaries, but he also suggests new models for appropriate *male* behavior in the role of Admetus."

house behind the theatrical façade. That is one point of the detailed account of her activities behind the scenes: space is extended beyond what we see; the halls of Admetus are enlivened so that later they can be stripped of life. A work of art—with all the movement and life that the ancients attributed to their works of art when they tried to describe them not as things but as things in relation to the viewer, who not only looked at them but watched them and participated in their making, is being described and created by the maid. What the maid tells did not really happen except in the poet's imagination. The dressing scene—so prominent in ancient epic and modern cinema—is highly theatrical, perhaps even metatheatrical, the character dresses consciously for a role and only then is shown playing that role to the hilt. The building of Alcestis into a woman begins with her naked self in the bath, her choice of clothing and accessories from her cedared closet, her adorning herself becomingly. Only three evocative lines are needed for a complete vision that would take many a vase painting to illustrate. She is dressing like a bride, perhaps, but also as mistress of the house and as one about to die (performing for herself a function usually done by the mourning women of the family, making this death analogous to a sacrifice or execution and making her one of her own mourners). The cedar wood of the coffin Admetus says he will share with her when he dies will echo this line which echoes Homer's line (*Iliad* 24.191–2) in the haunting scene of the ransom of Hector.[103] Perhaps Euripides also has in mind the choice of the *peplos* for Athene in book 6 of the *Iliad* (288ff.) and the denied prayer of the women.

The details are hardly amazing so far, except to an audience that was fascinated by lists and perhaps titillated by scenes of preparation. Dressing and in other ways preparing for the ordeal makes the ordeal more worthy, more noticeable and more dramatic, in a sensational way.

Perfect in appearance, perfect in equanimity, perfect in piety, Alcestis makes the rounds of the altars within the house, beginning naturally with Hestia's. Her hopes for her children indicate where her priorities lie and extend her aesthetic identity beyond herself.[104] If they

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[103] See A. M. Dale (1954) *ad* 160.

[104] Dyson (1988):14, Bell (1980):44 and others think that it is only for Admetus that she agrees to die and there are good arguments on either side. On the one hand the emotional scene in the bed chamber and the words πρεσβεύουσα (282) and προτιμῶσ' (155) argue for the priority of Admetus. On the other, the facts that

have all that she had and a long life, then what more could she ask for them? It is clear that she puts the children first: it is for them that she prays. Beginning with the neuter τέκνα, she then distinguishes them by gender, putting the little boy first. The fact that there is also a little girl makes the family more complete; there are more aspects of the human condition, more relationships of the heroine that can be included and explored. If her naming the little boy first is hierarchical rather than merely chronological (for surely the little boy is represented as older, the bigger of the two children on stage)[105] that hierarchy is dismissed by events in the play. For it is the existence of the little girl that is the deciding factor in her request that Admetus not take a new wife. The son may have been more prominent in her decision to die, since he and his rights will be protected by his father; there will be no one to protect the daughter unless Admetus accepts the role of her mother and perpetual widower as Alcestis requests (305, 377).

Marriage and death together, almost as a unity, are very much on her mind and very much associated with each other. She prays for her children's marriages, a dear wife and a noble husband respectively (165–6). Having uttered the words γενναῖον πόσιν, she thinks of her own death in behalf of her husband (167) and prays for her children to be long-lived and happy. The importance of the wife as an equal member of the household is one of the things that the play is about.[106] Alcestis prays for a long and joyful life for her children,

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Apollo speaks of saving the *house* (*rather than just the man*), that her own interest in the future is mostly concerned with the children and their futures, that her prayers are for the children, that the reason she gives for not wanting him to remarry concerns the little girl, and that the more personal and pathetic part of her last speech is addressed to the children argue for multiple (perhaps even contradictory) motivation.

[105] Since both were probably played by boys, the fact that one is a girl would be confirmed by her smaller size. For a catalogue of children in the plays, see G. M. Sifakis, "Children in Greek Tragedy," *BICS* 26 (1979):67–80.

[106] Nobility, wealth, long life, reputation: these are her stated values, unquestionably good Hellenic (some of them heroic as well) values. But there *is* more, more that can be imagined in the wide world. Alcestis herself, Admetus, Pheres, Heracles, and even the servants tell each other and us there is more. For example, Alcestis asks for a φίλην wife (165) for her son; perhaps just an unemotional, merely possessive Homeric use, but just possibly it could mean (as McDonald thinks) that Euripides is suggesting that there is more in a marital relationship than the institutional. *Philia* based on affection and favor becomes as the play progresses increasingly important and ultimately replaces that based on kinship alone (Scodel, 1979: esp. 60; Bell, 1980:59). This is what makes the happy ending happy, the affection of Alcestis and Admetus for each other that continues to develop (on Admetus' part) even after her death. Admetus values good cheer and the affection, the physical presence of his

but this is the very thing that is denied her husband and herself: the longer time of living that she has bought for him at the cost of her life denies him any joy in his life. In the scene with his father long life becomes a reproach and a curse.[107]

She attends to *all* the altars, leaving nothing undone. This is no doubt evidence of her perfection and its extension beyond herself.[108] Her perfection is a constant comment on Admetus' failures, his unwillingness to accept his own death, his possibly greater unwillingness to accept her death. We are asked to picture a perfect Alcestis who retains her equanimity and calm beauty (173–4) throughout the ritual and social performances.

This changes when she enters her bedroom. It is not the first sign of deep feeling: that came in her prayer to Hestia when she thought of her children, their lives and marriages and deaths which she prays to avert. But it is the first personal rather than familial, conventional, or institutional, thing she does. And even this, her most personal act, can also be interpreted as institutional or ritual: Alcestis remembers and repeats the tears of her wedding day, as she said goodbye to her virgin's cloister and as she entered for the first time her matrimonial chamber. As she enters the bedroom, various emotions and memories come rushing back: of her wedding day when she came to her husband's home and bed (leaving forever the νυμφίδιοι κοῖται, perhaps "maiden's chamber," of her native Iolcus, 249) and her reasons for dying now. She sees the beginning of her married life at its end. This is an aspect of her aesthetic vision: to see her life and death as a complete action with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning was her coming to the home of Admetus where she became a sexual being (referred to in lines 177–8), the end is her imminent death (179–81). The middle, of course, is her years as mistress of the house of Admetus, at which she has been a great success: witness the love of everybody in the household for her.[109] And thus Alcestis recognizes the perfection of her marriage; Admetus, too, eventually recognizes

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wife, above the heroic values. See Schein (1988) *passim* on φιλία in the play and for a less positive conclusion about Admetus (202–4).

[107] See Justina Gregory, (1979):259–270 (in my opinion one of the finest recent articles on the *Alcestis*), on the characters' identification of time with life (266–7) and (265–7) on Admetus' breaking down the distinctions between the living and the dead.

[108] Can it also be an oblique reference to a tradition that Admetus had been condemned to an early death because he had forgotten one of the gods (Artemis) in his nuptial sacrifices? Probably not. Euripides deliberately changed the story.

[109] It takes Admetus quite a bit longer to recognize the connection.

the perfection of *her* life and marriage, but not of his own which he sees as imperfect morally, aesthetically, and temporally. She will die rather than betray (or forsake) her marriage.[110] This was her choice, the choice not to be a widow, certainly an aesthetic and intended choice. She sees what life would be like after the event of her husband's death and will speak of the violent disruption that would result (287). Pheres sees his son's death as a possibility, but his vision is wholly selfish; Alcestis sees not only her life dismembered, but the children's part as well. Admetus does not recognize any of this, his place or hers or his father's, until his return from the funeral.

Tears come again when she thinks of an intruder, a less than perfect woman taking her place, playing the roles she played, and, as is filled in in the later scene, being the cruel, poisonous mother of her children, being the wife of her husband, being the one to grow to old age and stand by her children at the special moments of their lives, in short, being the Alcestis she can no longer be. This is Alcestis' lost future, recalling Apollo's futile request that she could grow old. But to Apollo it is only a word. The maid and later Alcestis herself fill in what it means to Alcestis. The other woman (of lines 181–2) is outside the picture, a supernumerary in this perfect marriage, a future that is not to be. This doubly imaginary character must be introduced here so that she can be given characteristics in the next episode.

In the maid's speech Alcestis is said to talk about the marriages of her children, distinguishing them only as necessary. Later, in her own voice, she talks about her daughter in particular, bringing up her concern for her daughter's reputation and for her future pregnancy. The special mother-daughter relationship is there given a few touching words.

To the bed she addresses a series of short phrases and sentences that might have been uttered between her sobs. This abbreviated version of her reason for dying (or accepting death), reported by the maid at 180 will be expanded in her own words. The servant obviously is shown thinking highly of her mistress: her beauty and calmness, her goodness and egalitarianism (an aspect of her being mentioned also by the other servant; Admetus, too, when he is feeling most unloved thinks of the affection for his wife that the servants feel). The maid is impressed with the fact that her mistress does not

[110] On the meaning of προδιδόναι see Rivier (1975, *Études*):93–100.

break down and cry until she enters her marriage chamber and throws herself on the matrimonial bed.[111] The incident in the bed chamber lasts only a few lines (175–188), but it is full of *ethos*.

Alcestis keeps turning back. The maid has replaced the epic poet as narrator and the dramatic subject as admirer. In the maid's account Alcestis is made almost to see herself as in a mirror, like Phaedra, admiring herself and her white skin as she dresses, *and* as in a work of literature. She sees herself as being like Andromache when she says farewell to her husband and keeps turning back to him as she walks away home and like Penelope when she waits for hers, weeping herself to sleep in their chamber. Part of Alcestis' vision of herself as ἀρίστη includes the momentary activation of these literary or aesthetic references to loved and loving wives, whose love is made more poignant by the potential or actual loss of or separation from the loved and loving husband. Alcestis' literary foray, however, makes her own story all the more poignant because in the one case we know that Hector will die fighting for his wife more than for all the rest of his family or people, and in the other, that Odysseus has given up immortality to return to Penelope.

For Alcestis the heroic literary husband is missing. And so she says goodbye to her chamber, her bed, her house, her children, and her servants. Even her egalitarianism is part of her self-perceived and authenticating perfection. Compared to her, Admetus when he is finally mentioned as a living presence is said to be suffering loss, confusion, emotional chaos, and a doubtless deserved loss of dignity. What *is* Admetus doing? The chorus wants him in the picture. The maid had left him out, because like the women at a philosopher's death, his carrying on, his fecklessness (cf. 202) detract from the perfection of the scene she has described. His presence would have spoiled the epic analogies. But, yes, he was there all along, weeping, physically supporting his wife, beseeching her not to leave him, and in general asking the impossible (201–203).

This perfect work of art will come to life at her entrance. Part of the wit of the piece is that Admetus will talk about a statue he will have sculpted by the finest craftsmen which he in turn will try to bring to life in his dreams and imagination and which, ultimately,

[111] Slaves who love their masters find such actions significant: we may think of Medea's nurse who mouths sentiments similar to those of Odysseus regarding marital harmony, but in a situation where they are so inappropriate as to be very nearly repellent.

with the help of Heracles we all see come to life at the end of the drama. Euripides has anticipated him in creating the perfect woman.

This whole scene and the next ask us to extend our concept of the space in which the drama takes place. The scene described is very domestic, but we are told (through its imitation of epic descriptions of warriors preparing for their *aristeiai*) that it is also heroic. Domestic, feminine, *and* heroic. Thus the interior of the house is used to blur the distinction between male and female ἀρετή. It is a scene better told than enacted because the narrative gives it its epic feel. Bathing and dressing are (needless to say) not suitable to the tragic stage.[112] Besides that, the scene contains too much movement, is too busy to be dramatic. On stage words are dramatic and words that can be answered are most dramatic.[113] The scene described by the maid belongs too much to a single person to be dramatic, that, at least, is how she puts it.[114]

The chorus returns to Admetus (199). They need to include him in their picture of the scene inside the house to which they like ourselves are imaginative spectators to this play within the play that is taking place in the imaginary space behind the *skēnē*. Their question fills in a detail that was left out and allows them to participate in the creation of the imaginary picture. To the chorus Admetus is still (but just barely) the subject and Alcestis the object he is losing. The maid's speech has gone a long way in presenting the female perspective. To her Alcestis is the subject, the one to be admired and quoted. What is so extraordinary about this narrative is its very ordinariness. The maid has put into words and into a heroic mode the quiet heroism of a woman. Into a domestic scene in which there is no event that is not an everyday occurrence the maid has placed the extraordinary deed of Alcestis. The mundane is made sublime by the exact timing. The event that we know to be impossible is put

[112] Although Aeschylus may have boldly staged Eteocles arming himself at the end of the shield scene in the *Septem*; see Helen H. Bacon, "The Shield of Eteocles," *Arion* III.3 (1964):27–38 (esp. 34–6).

[113] Even messenger speeches often include direct quotations in their narratives which make them both dramatic and emotive; see de Jong (1990):1–21. The messenger in *Hippolytus* states a clear and courageous opinion about the goodness of his master (1249–1254) and the messenger in *Medea* utters as his own message generalizations about the human condition worthy of Phaedra's nurse.

[114] We later learn that Admetus was there part of the time if not all along but his part is being diminished here, so that the chorus must remind the maid of his existence.

inside this interior, familiar, setting and treated as if it is something that is expected (Admetus expected one of his parents to die for him) and can be repeated (Pheres suggests this very thing). To be recognized for what it is, *this* miracle must be superseded by another even more astounding one. The resurrection shows us to what heroic class the sacrifice belongs.

The distinction between the living and the dead is blurred (139–143) in the continued emphasis on the liminal status of Alcestis.[115] The maid is at the doorway telling about Alcestis' last breaths. The chorus has just come to the doors and both addressed and examined them. With the maid they return to the questioning mode of the parodos, where doubt is expressed over their queen's status. Alcestis will die at the door and her bier will be laid out there briefly.[116] The distinction between inside and outside is established too, only to be blurred here and still further in the death scene that the scholiast (*ad* 233) was convinced should have taken place indoors. Drama in general makes the private world public to the audience of citizens who become involved in the creation (through shared experience) of the interiors, both what is behind the *skēnē* and what is behind the mask.[117]

The chorus, in response to this moving narrative sings a short song that returns us briefly to the male perspective[118] while reflecting on the words that have gone before. For example, they pray to Apollo in his role as healer to find a way (μηχανάν, 221), echoing the words of the slave (τἀμήχανα, 202–3). They talk about the gods one by one, reflecting to the outside world Alcestis' activity as she had gone to the interior altars one by one, but only getting as far as the two most necessary, Zeus and Apollo. They wonder about changing into their black robes in answer to the description of Alcestis dressing herself. The more somber clothing, the hopelessness[119] of their prayers are also preparation for the scene to come. And reflecting what the maid had said (196–7) they suggest that Admetus might as well hang himself (228–30).

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[115] See Buxton (1987):17–19.

[116] On the significance of the house door, see Buxton (1987):17–19, Ogle (1911):269–271, Padel (in Winkler and Zeitlin, 1990):346.

[117] The distinction is, of course, frequently further blurred because the domestic scene is so often that of a king where the *polis* is affected by what goes on inside the unseen *oikos*.

[118] See S. E. Scully (in Cropp et al., 1986) 137 and notes 13, 14.

[119] Πόρος (213; cf. 222 bis), λύσις (214, cf. 224), μηχανά (221), hopeful words of hopeless deliverance, underscore their loss of hope.

In taking up the theme suggested by the words τἀμήχανα ζητῶν (202–3) which mean to show the fecklessness of Admetus, the chorus turns the maid's reproach into an expression of hope for salvation, showing clearly their loyalty to the house and king (see especially the prayer to Paian to find a μηχανά, 220–1), for it is Admetus' irrational refusal to face facts that the chorus here imitates. The prayer for salvation keeps hope alive, if only verbally (but words are powerful in Greek drama), especially in the prayer to Zeus whose mortal son we are thus reminded will come and save Alcestis. The prayer to Apollo the healer is ironic, since we already know that Apollo is the cause of the present ἀμηχανία and is himself helpless to save the woman. Zeus, too, had his part in the complicated series of events that have led to the present ἀμηχανία: for it was he who struck down Asclepius, presumably for doing what Heracles will do, that is, for raising the dead. Knowledge, in particular, the knowledge that today is the fated day, takes away hope for the chorus. Knowledge gives *us* hope, however. The troubles spoken or sung of are still those of Admetus, but now the chorus for the first time dwells implicitly on the awkwardness of his position, ironically suggesting that his present grief is a worthy cause of suicide (228–230). After twice calling Alcestis ἀρίστη (235, 241) they suggest that Admetus' life is not worth living (242–3): his is definitely not the ideal life. It is, then, in the first episode and first stasimon that a very significant contrast between Alcestis and Admetus is established. That she is the "best wife" implies—given the circumstances—that he is a less than perfect husband. Her control is contrasted to his impotence: differences which are sustained in the following scene.

5. *The Second Episode and the Second Stasimon*

"What cannot be imitated, perfect must die"[120]

The maid's speech and the end of the choral ode are preparation for the pitiful spectacle we see as the family, wife, husband, children, servants and all come out of the house.[121] What has been accom-

[120] Bob Dylan, "Farewell, Angelina," stanza six, recorded version, 1/13/65, *The Bootleg Series*, vol. 2 (1991).

[121] On gatherings associated with the dying see S. Humphreys, "Death and Time" in *The Family, Women, and Death*, London, 1983:146–8.

plished so far? A number of literary allusions have heightened our sensitivity; Alcestis has been established as ἀρίστη; Admetus has been established as **not** ἄριστος. Like a defendant bringing forward his wife and children, aged parents and other dependents, Euripides trots out this interior tableau. Or is it like a funeral tableau, just a little out of time? The children are clinging to their mother's dress and sobbing; Admetus is supporting his wife's weakened body in his arms, begging her not to forsake him: so the scene has been described and what we see is the end of that scene. Presently we will hear Admetus repeat his futile and inept entreaty. Both husband and wife are presenting their case to the powers that be.

Alcestis is emotional, but not panicky. She is in the throes of Death (whom we have seen as a living bodied ogre) who is now cruelly and violently carrying her off as she cries "let me go" (263, 266). Are we to see this as a fantasy[122] in which we are seeing her seeing (and feeling) herself in the arms not of Admetus (as we the audience actually see on the stage)[123] but of Death?[124] The vision is all the more real for being aural and physical as well as visual (like Phaedra's fantasy). At the end of it Alcestis has exhausted herself (like Phaedra) and sinks to the couch.[125] Her terror is real and natural, all the more real because we have seen the figure of Death.

Alcestis is playing a central role in this scene, unusual for a (sacrificial) victim, two possible exceptions being Antigone whose point of view is sustained almost throughout her play and Iphigenia who seizes a role and a point of view near the end of her play.[126]

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[122] Similar to Phaedra's in the *Hippolytus* in which we see Phaedra taking herself out of her body and feeling the rapture so physically that at the end she perceives that she has broken a taboo not only of speech but of action.

[123] See S. E. Scully, "Some Issues in the Second Episode of Euripides' *Alcestis*," p. 144 in Cropp, Fantham, Scully (1986).

[124] The movement from the emotional to the rational mode is used in this play and in *Hippolytus* and *Medea* as part of the introductions of the feminine characters; in *Medea* the emotional is "from within"; in *Hippolytus* Phaedra, like Alcestis, cries out to the elements. Alcestis is calling upon natural elements, sun (fire) and light, air and earth. Water does not enter until she tells of her vision of the underworld.

[125] But unlike Phaedra's vision, Alcestis' is anything but liberating. Rather it is frightening to her to be in the grip of death.

[126] But are Alcestis and Antigone really sacrificial victims? Neither exactly fits the role or pattern. There is no oracle demanding sacrifice: Apollo's arrangement with the Fates hardly suffices in the *Alcestis*; for one thing it is not specific enough as far as the victim is concerned, and rather too personal in averting the death of only Admetus. In the *Antigone* the self-willed heroine is a victim not of human sacrifice but of capital punishment, more unjust in that its purpose is vengeful rather than

Alcestis is at the center of nature (244–5)—there she centers herself in her opening cries—and of the domestic scene, both here in Pherae and in Iolcus where she spent her girlhood before her marriage, and where she prepared for her wedding (248–9).[127] Admetus' part here is to focus still closer on his wife's centrality: he and the children look to her, concentrating almost suffocatingly all their and our own thoughts on her. The male perspective is weakening: Admetus is not the hero, only a survivor, if even that.

Her cries begin with the sun and heavens that see all, then come back to earth, and then close in on the house of her husband and that of her father. Admetus, forced into a secondary role,[128] still includes himself (σὲ κἀμέ, 246) and even, as Alcestis' vision becomes intensely personal he draws himself into it to the point of excluding her (258, μοι). The voyage is bitter to him; the journey is pitiable for him and the children (264–5). This is, of course natural for mourners and I do not mean to make too much of it: the dying person is already cut off (as is symbolized by the already cut lock 76). As Alcestis comes out of the trance, she sees the children dimly in the dark (269) and bids them a final farewell.

But no, she rallies for one last opportunity to create herself and to adjust the perception of her life, her heroic deed, and her possibilities. It is clear from the formality of her words that she is seeing herself as just having completed a scene to which she draws attention with the words "you see the state of my affairs" (280).

Admetus has been responding throughout her scene, but Alcestis has had nothing to say to him. Is this a realistic representation of the dysphoria of the ill much like her shaking off of those holding her up? Or is it a reflection of the distancing of those about to die from those who will go on living? Or does it reflect what we would call the "relationship" of Alcestis and Admetus? In any case, until

salvific, coming as it does after the danger to the community has already been averted, and of suicide more ironic in that it comes after Creon has changed his mind.

[127] This is perhaps what she means by νυμφίδιοι κοῖται (249), not an oversight which would spoil both the emphasis in the maid's speech on the marriage bed and Admetus' reminiscence when he returns from the funeral; for Euripides has gone to some pains to enliven the *place* and to create a real interior. Having done that it would not be very "economical" of him to forget where the marriage was consummated so soon. See Luschnig, "Interiors" (1992).

[128] "Magnanimity can be extremely vexatious to the bystanders, for it forces them into secondary roles that are not much fun to play," Robertson Davies, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, 1989 p. 275.

this point she has not seemed aware of any living, human person attempting to communicate with her. Once again Admetus is something of an unwanted bystander. This time he is given a voice and a presence, but his presence diminishes him. We can see that he is there, but his words are inconsequential (now, though later they become effective, creating reality). Even now in the rational speech, although Alcestis does address Admetus, she does not pay attention to what he says except when she recognizes and responds to his promise not to remarry. Euripides, with the help of Admetus, manages to keep his heroine alive for another scene in part through his long speech which she is forced to listen to. If she is to have a final farewell scene, she must at least survive to the end of Admetus' promise.[129]

There is not much left to say when she begins. We know almost all there is to know about Alcestis. And yet without this speech she (and we) would be the poorer, her case less than perfectly represented by her advocate Euripides. This speech is her apology, the expression of her aesthetic identity. Her self-awareness is to be expressed in others' boasts. What makes her the *best*, best wife and best mother? It can be nothing other than her present death. That, and the considerations that went into the making of the decision, all of which are details of what she sees as (her) perfection. Her *death* is valorized in the words that Euripides gives her. In the inanition of Admetus, her *life* will be valorized, although there are certain hints of her value as a living person in the maid's speech. That it was the marriage bed and not any person who was said to be depriving her of life is surely significant.[130] Admetus had been kept out of even this, the most intimate part of the shifting scene in the house, where

[129] Is her unresponsiveness a reflection of the self-absorption of the dying? One thing is clear: Alcestis does take the superior attitude of those about to die to those who will go on living. Socrates, whose death is also represented not only in the *Crito* but in the *Apology* too as a free choice and therefore of tragic stature, may say "only the god knows for sure." It is apparent, however, that he is quite certain that he is the one going to the "better thing".

[130] Are we to think of the famous marriage bed of the *Odyssey*, only to see how little life and intimacy this marriage bed symbolizes compared to that remarkable creation of a remarkable man and woman? Even though Odysseus and Penelope have been apart for so long—and he has been sexually unfaithful (not that sexual fidelity was a particular value for Greek males)—their marriage is alive, and not as an abstraction. Odysseus has chosen Penelope over immortality. Admetus has chosen—whether he made the choice actively or passively—life (an extended mortality or the illusion of immortality) over his wife. Is it possible that Euripides is commenting on the changed status of women and, therefore, of men since the age described in the epics? By creating certain similarities between the death and resurrection of

Alcestis is depicted as darting around as in a dream. The obvious reproach to him is avoided.

Alcestis is the only one to be killed, but another woman could take her place: she is not yet guaranteed a unique role in even that very particular place, her bed. Her insistence that Admetus not remarry is motivated in part by her view of herself as unique and their marriage as perfect.[131] At the same time she can protect her children from the more likely possibility of a worse woman's being their stepmother and hurting the product and proof of her marriage to Admetus, the son and daughter she loves. Her boast is to be their boast and not hers after all (for a similar thought see Phaedra's great speech, *Hippolytus* 421–5): she offers a parent's view of a child's perception of a parent's reputation. Her perfection spreads beyond herself to unite all those who are yoked together by or as a result of this marriage. The family is complete here seemingly for the last time. Outsiders will come along and make up a couple, but they are the wrong two persons.[132] Heracles will come back with a woman (that is, a couple enters in the final scene, their relationship ambiguous). But the real scenic couple is made up of two *men* at least until Admetus claims his bride and Heracles leaves. The play is about marriage, in life and in death. The marriage is confirmed not only by a number of gestures but equally by the departure of the outsider and by the absence in the final moments of members of other generations of the οἶκος.[133]

Replaceable You: Admetus' Part

The second episode shows us, as Lloyd argues, what Alcestis has to lose;[134] from the most general (leaving the light) to the most particular (events in her children's lives which she will have to miss). From

Alcestis and the absence and homecoming of Odysseus, he does encourage the audience to draw some comparisons.

[131] She cannot guarantee universal uniqueness—that she would be the only woman ever to die for her husband—since that is something beyond her control.

[132] Outsiders really play little or no part in the marriage; ξένοι are only temporary residents in the οἶκος, though they can do much good or harm. Heracles' role is to undo what the earlier ξένος had done, but perhaps with an important difference which results from his knowledge of the mortal condition.

[133] See Dyson (1988):22 on the importance of the presence or absence of the children.

[134] For the "emphasis on the richness of Alcestis' life" see Lloyd (1985):121, 129.

her criticism of his parents and her expectation of reciprocity we can infer the values she is represented as holding most dear.[135] When she accuses the parents of betraying their son by not dying for him, she herself betrays an inability to imagine a way of being or seeing other than her own. That Admetus' parents should not see their roles as she does is incomprehensible to her: that they are for themselves not merely parents, but individuals with multiple roles. Life does not consist simply in playing one role or in having one relationship: Pheres' role teaches this. Admetus does not see himself as only a father. On the other hand this narrowed vision is what lets her make such a decision. And it is her request which helps teach Admetus how important *she* is to him; he is forced to put into words his feeling of loss. Her role of subservience to home and husband is at first almost all there is, and of course those functions could be done by another woman. *Almost* all there is, because Alcestis is "the best".[136] Her centrality in her scene gives the lie to this subservient status: she is not only the center of attention but the director of the action, marking out Admetus' role for him as well as the futures of the rest of the family, including her children's weddings, her daughter's suitors and childbirth, even anticipating problems in setting up a good match for the girl child. These roles (of perceived subservience, of actual artistic control) of course are partly shaped by the story, but they are fleshed out by Euripides in part at least to show who Admetus is. Only Admetus of the named human characters comes close to recognizing that his wife Alcestis cannot be replaced: everyone else suggests replacing her, Pheres in earnest, Heracles in jest, Alcestis herself in sad resignation. He is the one who experiences the emotional outbursts, the one who cannot handle (the admittedly unbearable) reality. She was more than just her role, but she never realized it until she was about to give it up. Apparently no one else in her family did either. There is a person behind the young matron's mask which continues to grow after her death through others' affection for her. The narratives of the two servants show us that reality. Admetus

[135] Other sacrificial victims (Macaria in *Heraclidae*, for example) refuse offers of substitution by another; Alcestis (like Admetus) would gladly have accepted the sacrifice of Pheres or of Admetus' mother.

[136] Her record is one that is not likely to be broken: we are even asked to imagine what a woman would have to do to surpass her (153–4 in the maid's speech). The returned Alcestis is, however, ontologically superior to the dying and dead one: there is a better way to honor one's husband than by dying for him and that is by living with him; cf. Gail Smith (1983), especially 136, 142.

is not the only person rewarded by her return: the servants and her own children will have their protector back. The last two pictures of her, Admetus' as he thinks of the house empty and ill-kept and especially as he pictures Thessalian parties through her eyes and the chorus' vision of her as a blessed δαίμων continuing to benefit others, both contribute to her growing persona. At the end there is a second real person behind the mask, but the same fictional one. Which is the more real?[137]

When Alcestis begins her *apologia* the first σε (282) is embraced by her and her action, but by the time she next addresses her husband with a second person pronoun, she has interposed the fact that she did not have to die for him and the phrase ὑπὲρ σέθεν (284) is left over at the end of the line (like a widower). She could have replaced him: a spouse is always replaceable (witness how often they are replaced in tragedy, whether the previous one has died or not), but a parent or sibling and sometimes a child (especially when the parents are old) is not. Even more telling is the fact (296–7) that her husband will have to live widowed with the orphaned children. He must live the life she has rejected (287–8). The two passages which describe their lives (287–8, 296–7) consist of one line and three and one half feet each, are very close metrically, and use synonyms and paronyms making it quite clear that a comparison is being made and that Admetus is to be burdened with the life Alcestis recognized as intolerable. The differences are also telling. She would have *lived* without him (ζῆν, 287); he is *lamenting* without her (ἔστενες, 296 in a contrary-to-fact condition). The two participles also show interesting differences, the violent ἀποσπασθεῖσά σου opposed to μονωθείς. In the action just past we have seen Alcestis being wrenched away by death, her young life torn off her limbs. Just before the brief description of the life Admetus has in store for him is a reminder (unintended but implied by Alcestis) that his life has run out, when she says, "we would have lived for the rest of our lives" (295). In truth there would have been no "rest" of his life if she had not freely given it to him.

At line 299 she turns to her main point. Once again the children are prominent in her thinking. The males always come first and came first in her original decision. This, of course, is an assumption that is

[137] Euripides is having a bit of a joke about the theatrical conventions. See Winnington-Ingram (1969) especially 130ff. on Euripidean mockery of dramatic conventions.

questioned and overthrown in the play and in this scene in which obviously Alcestis is central. The female side balances the male and if it were not for the presence of a male chorus would overshadow it. The little girl gains prominence at the end of this speech. A little girl needs a mother to be there for her, to arrange her wedding and stand by her in childbirth, something no stepmother is likely to do. And so the intrusion in *τοῖσδε μητρυιὰν τέκνοις* (309): the stepmother brings out the distinction between the two: in the eyes of the natural parents they had been equal. Even τέκνοις is used because its root talks about giving birth. The thought of a stepmother makes her think of the gender related differences more closely. In the other passage about the children (165–9) the μέν and δέ clauses had been simply generic. Now she thinks of the special mother-daughter relationship, the shared experience of women, made more special by the seven lines addressed just to the little girl (313–319; at 320 she begins the transition of address to both children and Admetus). Admetus, though he promises to be mother to the children, is not to be seen as taking on the special role of the real mother; all he can do is protect the children from a stepmother. But this promise also is another way of excluding a new wife. He takes over her role. He does not become her. Not yet.

For the first time, Admetus' respectability has become conditional: the chorus will condemn him if he should remarry. His choices are so limited, both by his wife's final wish and especially by his own promises, that his only possibility (provided that he keep his promise to her) is to wait for death. The life to which he has condemned himself is a life without pleasure, to be spent remembering his former existence. Is this meant to make us think of Hades (as it is traditionally pictured)? Alcestis and Admetus had started out their married life as equals, bride and groom equally noble on both sides (920–1). The death of Alcestis has created a vast gap between them, almost more than that between the living and the dead. Admetus has tried to bridge the gap between the living and the dead in literal, spatial, and temporal ways, by making his own life a living death.[138] But he has failed in the competition to be best. Finally he has to admit his failure to keep her with him.[139] He does this in stages.

Admetus' extravagant plans and promises for mourning his wife

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[138] Admetus contracts his world until he excludes even his father and his friend and becomes almost autistic in his grief.

[139] The attempt to deny the finality of the separation in part explains Admetus'

reveal several things about him. First he is confused. But rather than knowingly lessening the value of her sacrifice,[140] his promise to never be happy again is unquestionably an attempt to pay her back, to die to pleasure as she dies to the light.[141] On the other hand he is trying to keep her alive, first begging her not to forsake him, and then conceiving of the bizarre notion of making an effigy of her to keep in his bed, "a chilly delight" (353) and to meet her in his dreams (354–6) and finally to resume their home-making again in the next world (363–4). He is trying to meet his obligation to her by promising that his life will be utterly joyless and at the same time, by centering his only pleasures (the statue and his dreams) around her as if she were still sometimes and somehow alive, to deny the totality of their separation.[142] His fantasies come true at the end of the play: she returns to him as in a dream; the draped and silent figure is like the statue he envisions; and finally they resume their lives together when they go into their home, transformed into the hateful house of death and back again to the rich and blessed house of Admetus and Alcestis, with blessings to spare (1137, 1153): thus something of the blessed δαίμων of the chorus' last song does return with the resurrected Alcestis.

Another effect of his promise is that he holds her place for her, both as self and other. Alcestis threw herself on the empty bed and kissed it; Admetus says that he will throw himself upon the statue in the bed and embrace it, calling it by her name, pretending that he has her. He will imagine her back alive (not much comfort for her). Art, imagination, praise and poetry are ways of keeping her alive, but what finally is needed is a combination of art and force.[143] As Alcestis is "a woman by art",[144] Admetus (and Euripides) keep her alive by art. In the existence Admetus *imagines* for her beyond the

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inability to confide in his friend Heracles that his wife has died: that is, he has not accepted her actual death now.

[140] As some critics would have it. See Gregory (1979):265; Beye (1959):115, 120.

[141] Cf. Scully (in Cropp et al., 1986):142.

[142] See Scully (1986):143; on the statue, see Franco (1984): *passim*, O'Higgins (1993):88–91: "A model of a woman is a model of a model" (89). See also Ketterer (1990):17–20.

[143] On this see Segal (*Orpheus*, 1989):19, "Heracles conquers death, not by persuasion and art but by their exact opposite, brute force." To use art was not Heracles' part but Admetus'.

[144] See Bassi's suggestive piece (1989) esp. 23–25, "Alcestis, like a statue, is only a woman by art." Cf. Bell (1980):66, "The veiled woman is the promised statue brought to life."

grave (a somewhat naive vision of the afterlife), he pictures a continuing life for her, something that is needed if she is to return. It may be that he continues "to make demands on her"[145] but that is only part of it. She did not repudiate her marriage, her marriage bed, or Admetus. Her life was a delight (289) to her and she was sorry to be leaving it, especially because she would be missing events in her children's lives. By seeing her alive in the other world and doing similar things there (δῶμ' ἑτοίμαζ', 364) he contributes to her return to her old life. The positive side of his denying her death is that she is given a purpose in death and is kept alive in death. In their scene together he even tries to keep her bound in time: "wait for me and make a home for me in the other world" (363–4). Without the irrational denial of her death (the refusal to accept its finality) there could be no return. If she had been allowed to pass with little notice and been forgotten as many other victims are, return could not have been accomplished, because it would not have been actively desired. Admetus creates in the audience an expectation to which we respond by finally believing the second *muthos* (519) about her. He also creates a second *muthos* about himself by denying his own life, by trying to share her death, by finally accepting his own death.

The extravagance of Admetus' promises elevates his mourning above the merely conventional, while at the same time relieving it of tragic weight.

The statue, the dreams, the plans for his own funeral, later his attempt to join her in the grave, all these show the same sorts of things about Admetus: his character does have a recognizable continuity of self. He did not accept his own death and now is clinging for as long as he can to his wife. As the servant says, he does not understand that she is separated from him until he experiences her loss (in full, that is, not until after the funeral during which he tries inanely to be reunited to her). There is nothing unnatural in this. As long as he is busy with the funeral he is with her, giving her the proper honors, doing something for her. He protects her from Pheres and does other more or less appropriate things in her behalf. Time catches up with him when he returns home from the graveside. Her place will be empty forever. He cannot face that and what it means. These emotions are so understandable that it is tempting to call them

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[145] McCoughey (1972):43–4 believes that this speech is comic.

"natural." He begins conventionally, but becomes more and more spontaneous and creative in his grief.

In Admetus' response to Alcestis' request the theme of competitiveness is sustained: there is no prospective bride more noble or better looking. There are enough children. In praying for enjoyment of them he remarks that he did not have enjoyment of her (335): this of course is a conventional thing to say when a loved one dies young. The survivor has not had enough of her or him. But the very conventionalism of such statements under the unique circumstances here makes Admetus' remarks ironic. As his father will point out, Admetus could hardly have gotten better value out of his wife!

The children had been very much on Alcestis' mind.[146] She agreed to die certainly in large part because of them. So she says insistently and consistently.[147] The children are the consummation of her marriage to Admetus and the culmination of her life so far. Her request that he not remarry is bound inextricably to the children: "do not marry a step-mother over these children" (305).[148] It is as if the marriage itself continues to exist in the life of the children, and, when Alcestis says later, "you be mother instead of me" (377), she is trying to make sure that it will continue to be as complete as possible with Admetus playing both parts. Admetus assures her in what cannot be empty words that she will be his only wife whether living or dead and that he must become mother to the children, an ill-fitting role for him to play and perhaps as little comfort to the motherless little girl as the sculpted Alcestis would have been to Admetus. This is one of a number of sex reversals for Admetus, part, perhaps, of a more general role reversal from victim to survivor to victim.[149] What-

[146] Would Admetus have been able to accept the terms if there had been no children? If the children, especially the little boy, were to die untimely, could Admetus keep his promise? "What if" questions are usually not appropriate, but here, since it is often remarked that Euripides changed the chronology of the story by putting off Alcestis' acceptance of death for Admetus until after children were born instead of on their wedding day, we are, perhaps, permitted to consider why Euripides gave Alcestis children and why precisely these children, a boy and a girl and why he uses them as he does. Cf. Dyson (1988), *passim*.

[147] Can it be that her rational arguments that seem overly self-absorbed and self-conscious are like Iphigenia's, which are voiced in part to keep her courage up, to keep herself convinced that there really is a reason bigger than all of them that compels her to give her life, that compels her father and the Hellenes? But Iphigenia says so and Alcestis does not.

[148] Dale *ad* 305 (p. 77) [do not] "take in a second marriage on top of the one these children represent."

[149] On the blurring of gender roles see also Charles Segal, "Euripides' *Alcestis*:

ever his shortcomings, Admetus is not a poseur. He is consistent in his discomfort and in the discomfort he spreads to others. And he does toward the end of his stage life do as she had asked and at least see himself in her place.

His bleak future (which is to start αὐτίκ' (322), "right away") he now begins to map out. His grief will last until he dies. In fact his life will be one long rehearsal for his death. The house will be quiet, no music, no glad sounds. He will place the statue[150] in his bed and hug it for affection, motionless, bloodless enjoyment, but all that he will have with the joys of friendship and music gone. But, no, Admetus is not satisfied with negative reminders. He will drain out some of the weight of his sorrows with the lifeless statue.[151] He animates it in his next declaration. She will move back and forth in his dreams. A constant characteristic of dreams is the flitting (cf. φοιτῶσα, 355) of insubstantial shapes and another is, as Admetus notices, the unpredictability of their duration (ὅντινα χρόνον, 356), in this, not so different from the unpredictability of life.[152] And so, Admetus, having promised total sensual deprivation (347 is the low point), now begins to re-animate his world. First there is the likeness (which he can see and touch), which in his dreams he will set in motion, making it become more actually his wife. Then he gives himself an active—if hopeless—role as the Orpheus figure who would bring his wife back into the light (a hopeless wish used with even greater pathos in the *IA*). The deconstruction of Admetus shows us his parts: Euripides presents him to us first by having him take himself apart. We see him most clearly when we see him denying everything that makes him himself. He cannot be himself until he is alone but then he cannot be himself because, alone, he is no longer whole.

Admetus' speech, like Alcestis', is self-defining. Having attested to his love for his wife by saying that he would go down to Hades to rescue her, if only he could, he returns to his more passive role (as

Female Death and Male Tears," *CA* 11 (1992):142–158, esp. 147–52.

[150] On the statue, see Carlo Franco (1984):131–6; Robert C. Ketterer (1990): 3–23; Charles P. Segal's excellent piece (1993):37–50, especially his comments on substitution and on the statue as a point of crossing between the aesthetic and religious.

[151] Perhaps the (dead) weight of the statue is too much a reminder of the present condition of Alcestis (205 "a sorrowful weight for his arms" on which he is calling "do not leave me"; βάρος of 353 of course does not refer to the weight of the statue but to the weight of his troubles).

[152] On the unpredictability of life as a theme and the value of "the gift of Prometheus", see Gregory (1979), *passim*.

if even the contrary-to-fact condition were too active for him in his present state of deprivation). He begins and ends with her unique favor to him (μόνη 330, 368).

Part of his grief is to be the hatred and rejection of his parents. Alcestis was the *only* one faithful to him. No other affections are to be allowed to get in the way of his love and mourning for her. Her gift saved his life (340–1). His life will be like a monument to her memory: permanent, that is, as long as his life lasts. The statue is a sign of the oddness of events: usually the permanent monument is there for the honor of the dead person, but he will keep it with him as a companion, a secret, intimate memorial rather than a public one. At the end, in the last ode, the monument becomes public at the moment of the return of Alcestis from divinity to woman.

The scene, or Admetus' part in it, whether a parody or not, has its darker moments (especially 381, 383, 387).

Alcestis leaves the action at 391. Even so, she remains in control. Only in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* is a victim so prominent for so long, and Iphigenia is prominent in part because she is kept *alive* almost until the end of a play, the plot of which is a series of delays to keep her alive until the end with false hopes. Other victims, even Antigone, are soon forgotten. The situation changes; the focus shifts (to war, to revenge, to other deaths) in most plays in which a victim dies early or at any time before the end. In the *Alcestis*, Alcestis remains in control of the plot and the plot keeps her alive, even when all reasonable hope is lost. Here a new action is suggested (attempts are made to change the story) but it never happens. The rhetoric of the situation remains hers and hers alone. The arrival of the guest brings a complete, sudden, change of mood, but it calls attention to itself as an oddity and if that is not enough the chorus calls attention to it. Heracles' ignorance is itself "about Alcestis." How and when will he find out about *her*? An element of suspense is added by these questions. The "trend of the action"[153] returns to the funeral. The Pheres scene threatens to take the plot into a new direction which fizzles before it really gets started.

Every scene—even the one in which Admetus is less than candid with his friend—is about Alcestis and about what her life and death mean. The only exception comes during the brief exchange between the chorus and Heracles. Here the magic of the theatre or the magic

[153] This term and "rhetoric of the situation" are borrowed from A. M. Dale.

of this man,[154] or both, changes the tone and the subject. When the chorus scolds Admetus for being insensitive to his situation and to the loss of his wife, they have already been guilty of his indiscretion themselves. It is almost as if—in the pause before the irrevocable step of consigning Alcestis to the grave—the scene has shifted back to the beginning. There are still no outward signs of mourning. The chorus certainly does not communicate to Heracles any ethical signs of great sorrow. Such changes in focus away from Alcestis are short-lived, however. The arrival of Heracles takes the plot in a new direction. Though coming in the midst of the death and burial of Alcestis, it restores life to the plot. Admetus is so distracted that he does not realize that this is what he is doing when he invites the guest to stay in his house; he is only honoring the institutions. He is concerned with the reputation of his house and yet hardly aware of how his action affects the actual house.

After Alcestis breathes her last word of farewell, her little boy sings at her body, or mouths the words while the actor playing Alcestis sings his pathetic monody.[155] His first stanza is rather like his father's picture of himself and the statue, as he embraces the listless body and calls her name (μαῖα 393, μᾶτερ 400, 401). The simultaneous presence and absence are emphasized: she is gone, she is no more, she has left; but at the same time she is there, and he calls on her and even remarks (with scenic self-consciousness) that he calls on her. In the second stanza (because even this brief time has made her less there?) the address changes and the boy turns to his father and sister to share his suffering. The other trend of the reaction to her sacrifice—present already in Admetus' speech—is that it is ruinous rather than salutary.

Despite what the child says, the marriage was not in vain. Surely the existence of children is proof of that. To say that it was in vain does an injustice to Alcestis who dies for the ideal both in general and in particular, that is, for the ideal of a perfect marriage (institutionally) and for her marriage to Admetus. The little boy needed and got a tower of strength in his own natural father. His rights as heir come first. Is the little girl only an afterthought?[156] Alcestis justifies

[154] Cf. Thornton Wilder's *Alcestiad*.

[155] See Dale xx. Arnott (1989):47 adds that "the audience would automatically associate the voice, though coming from the adult actor, with the character who was moving, the child."

[156] To Alcestis, not to Euripides; see Dyson on the "planned family," 1988:16.

both her request to Admetus not to remarry and her disgust with his parents by her own parental love and protectiveness of her children. Her past in the house of Admetus is a short one; had there been no children she (like Pheres) would have had no future in it and much less reason to be loyal to it.[157]

The child's despair, then, is subversive of his mother's intent. "With you gone, mother, the house is fallen into nothing" (414–415). Alcestis had already made it clear (284–6) that such a thing would not have happened had Admetus died. At least the despair would have been missing. Alcestis could have (and would have) married another rich Thessalian and together they would have managed (in their separate ways) the house (estate and family) of Admetus. Little would have changed for her: Admetus is such a vague figure until his scene with his father that it is unlikely that he is to be seen as irreplaceable. Alcestis would not have inherited it, but she might, like Penelope, in the absence of other claimants (of which there seem to be none, given the short list of Admetus' φίλοι) and the retirement of the aged father, her father-in-law, have had the use of it while her son was a minor and by custom would have been one of his dependents, to be cared for in her old age. Or more likely she would have passed into the οἶκος of her new husband and like at least some other widows have reared her children, preserved the estate and passed it on to little Eumelus.[158] Her long speech shows that her decision is not logical if the institutional aspect of family life is of more importance to her than the perfection of her own life and marriage: Admetus, once he has fathered a son, is no more valuable than his wife or his parents. We see, I think, that with the little boy there to inherit, Admetus could easily have been forgotten in a new marriage. But that new marriage does not correspond to Alcestis' ideal.

The death scene ends with reference to the ἐκφορά (422), a call for signs of mourning, and a return to the positive aspects of Alcestis' sacrifice (432–4). After her death (in the middle of line 391) although there can be no more delays, there are still ways of keeping her alive.

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[157] Even Heracles, the guest, has a past in the house of Admetus. It is more than likely that he has been entertained there before.

[158] See Isaeus orations 7 and 11.

Music

The right mixture of emotions, sorrow and admiration, is to be seen in the second stasimon. Alcestis is pictured in the process of making the journey. In the parodos the chorus had considered its own journey, far afield to various altars and shrines; in the first stasimon they had been more stationary, concentrating on the house. *Farewell*, they sing now (once again 436), *you are the best, but there, in Hades.* Poets will praise you in Sparta (449) and Athens (452) at festivals.[159] If only I could bring you back to the light (455–9, like Orpheus)! But, since that is impossible despite your unique bravery, they continue, "light may the earth fall upon you" (462–3). The journey has ended with the stationary tomb, perhaps a step toward the reversal, for earlier they had taken her beyond the grave to the other world. In order to be ready for Heracles she must pause—however briefly—in the tomb.

> *Admetus had better not remarry. The parents were old, but unwilling to die. But you, in your youth, died. If only I had a wife like you I would be happy all my life long* (463–5, 466–70, 471–5).

This song is a magical transition. The chorus ushers Alcestis and Admetus into the house (at 435–7), but it is only a step on her real journey to the sunless halls of Hades. As she is being carried into the palace, the chorus is singing the words "within the halls of Hades" (436). This is the beginning of the transfiguration that is concluded after the funeral: the metamorphosis of Admetus' house into the house of death (a device used more terrifyingly in the *Heracles*).

The second stasimon reviews the subjects treated in the previous scene: the *arete* of Alcestis, condemnation of Admetus' parents (the chorus like Apollo earlier is particularly hard on Admetus' mother, 466), marriage and remarriage, the longing to save Alcestis. The Orpheus theme, a constant motif, recurs here, with the chorus casting itself in the futile role of Orpheus (455–459). Admetus had wished for Orpheus' gift of song (357–362). But the effectual Orpheus figure of this story, the one who will actually bring back the woman is Heracles who will enter unexpectedly in the next scene, on his way not irrelevantly to Orpheus' home, Thrace. Though the chorus does

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[159] That is, after her death her fame will spread beyond her hearth to two *poleis* with opposite ways of seeing and treating women: if her heroism is masculine in an Attic setting, perhaps we are invited to view it in a Laconian one; the audience as willing worshipper must participate in the heroization.

not explicitly say the name of Orpheus in the present strophe, they do put their wish to be the savior figure in juxtaposition to a strophe on song. The emphasis of this ode is on the actual death and journey of Alcestis and especially on her future as subject of song in Sparta and Athens. Music, we may remember, was a particular pleasure of Admetus and it is one of the things he will give up forever (he says). He will give up music because Alcestis has taken away all his pleasure (τέρψιν, 347), but he will replace her with a likeness on which he will call, which he will hold in his arms, a "cold pleasure" (τέρψιν, 353). The statue cannot hear and so song is in vain; speaking her name is a comfort for *his* ears not the statue's. This effigy in his bed will encourage dreams of her. If only he had the skill of Orpheus to bring back the real Alcestis. We see the progress of his thought as he moves from the sounds of the lyre or flute that will be silenced to the silent statue to the fleeting dreams to the futile wish for the magical charm of Orpheus. The reality that he is not Orpheus justifies his asceticism in renouncing music. Music is useless. In the ode, however, the chorus gives another use (besides pleasure and persuasion) for music, the praise of heroes and (as in this case) heroines. Admetus' promises and his artistry—first in imagining the fabrication of the statue and then in predicting his dream which will give the carved wood moving parts, as it were, and then the wish for the song of Orpheus—all these are fulfilled in the second stasimon where Alcestis receives a kind of immortality through memory and music, but still in terms of the warmth of flesh and blood and affection it is a frigid pleasure like the children's boast of her fame. Neither make up for the loss of love.

In the second stasimon as in the last ode, there is direct address to Alcestis. In the last ode the chorus is distanced from her through the insertion of an anonymous, imaginary, wayfarer pictured as addressing her. The "hail" here is answered there too. Here χαίρουσά μοι (436) is something of a contradiction. But there (at line 1005) it is a greeting to a powerful spirit. Like Admetus, at the beginning of the ode they picture Alcestis alive in the Halls of Hades (436–7). And the ode ends with their wish for a wife just like her, a bit chilling considering its juxtaposition to her death. But the chorus is joining in Admetus' artistry (especially when they give her a dwelling place: δόμοις οἶκον . . . οἰκετεύοις, 436–7; and when they wish that they were Orpheus). In despising his parents and loving his wife they come close to imitating him.

The direct address in this ode is to Alcestis' departing corpse as it is carried into the house. In the play's last ode, which ends with the direct address of an interposed traveller, in fact the address is literally to her as she returns at that moment with Heracles. On the one hand their last song begins with the uselessness of music in the face of Necessity. On the other it contributes to her resurrection as she is escorted back by the wayfarer who had turned off the road at her memorial. Song brings her back, in part, the song of the *tragoidoi*.

The contradiction inherent in the last lines (which could almost be part of a happier song, even a wedding song in which the chorus celebrates the virtues of the bride and expresses a *pro forma* wish to be in the bridegroom's place) does not interfere with the chorus' expression of admiration and love. This anomaly is at the heart of the tragic or quasi-tragic element in the *Alcestis*. To have the *best* wife means to have no wife, which in turn would make us think of a common comic expression like "it is better to bury a wife than marry one." The man who was fortunate enough to have such a superlative wife is to live out the rest of his life in unbearable sorrow. But the chorus is not thinking along these lines. The paradoxical implications of their truisms must continue to escape them as they do so often elude the chorus. They want to praise the woman who was so brave and good that her devotion and fidelity to her husband are entering the realm of myth. What better way to praise her than to wish for a wife like her, to think about what life would be like if they possessed such a wife themselves? They do not recognize the contradiction. They do make us, in our reflective role, think about it.[160]

Song and myth keep alive the memory of the good.[161] This is an effective use of language. The Orpheus story hinted at by the chorus in the second strophe is another, more palpably effective, use of words and song. The chorus combines the two, going a step further than song's capacity to keep alive the *memory* of the heroic dead. The chorus has a real part in the resurrection plot. They transform the song of mourning into a song of married *life*, in which they see themselves having a part. Admetus had, at the start of this song, escorted his wife into the house for the last time. When he returns from the

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[160] Even the fact that the chorus is giving voice to this sentiment is jolting. Marriage is between two people, not a group. In the *kommos*, once again they speak as an individual, when they tell of a relative who lost his only son.

[161] A point made eloquently by William Arrowsmith, editor and translator, *Euripides Alcestis*, Oxford, 1974:23–27.

funeral he will remember the first time the two entered the house together. The wedding, the death, and the resurrection are all linked together by ritual, by memory, by motive, by gesture, and by lyric themes. At the end of the second strophe the chorus gives its opinion of Admetus if he should ever remarry and escort another woman into this house.

Throughout the second stasimon Alcestis is addressed as if she were alive and hearing and interested in the things said of her (as is common in funeral songs and epitaphs) as she was, too, in the child's song, though the little boy stressed her simultaneous presence and absence. It may be odd for a chorus of old men to wish for a new wife, but the words they sing put them more fully and actively into the picture while at the same time honoring the dead woman as a wife (473–5):

> May it be my lot to have such a dear companion. This is a rare portion in life. For then she would be with me without sorrow through my life.[162]

6. *Third and Fourth Episodes*

These are the words that Heracles may be supposed to hear on his way, just before he speaks. The chorus—intent on its song—does not notice him until he addresses them. He arrives, an unexpected guest, full of life, ready to enjoy a respite from his grueling labors and travels. No signs of mourning are yet visible. He has no reason to suppose that anything extraordinary has happened. The spell is not broken until the arrival of Admetus displaying the signs of mourning on his person.

The arrival of Heracles, to be sure, changes the tone of the play: he is the savior, unsuspected, but hoped for by chorus and Admetus. But it is soon back on its zigzag track once Admetus appears in mourning. What, if anything, do the labors of Heracles have to do with Alcestis? She is to become one of them, but, freely chosen or imposed by friendship and a combination of gratitude, obligation, and duty (i.e. χάρις). Do Alcestis and Heracles provide heroic models for each other? Is the rescue of Alcestis a kind of training for the next labors? No doubt it has features in common with other labors:

[162] As Dale points out *ad loc.* this is a *locus communis* about the rarity of a good wife.

subduing the master/monster (440, 843), the contest of strength (489, 1141, 1026); the bloody stables prefigured by the bloody offerings. Heracles will go down to Hades—he suggests this as a possibility if he should fail to wrest Alcestis from Death—but not until a later labor. On the other hand, Alcestis herself has faced the κύριος of the dead and been subdued by him. The difference is that there was no chance of her being able to defeat him. Her death was predetermined; there was no fair fight, not even a fight heavily weighted in his favor. There was simply no fight at all, only a struggle to complete her scene and direct the plot. She gave herself up for Admetus, becoming a man's fantasy of a female hero.[163] Death took her as his possession. The chorus tells Heracles he will never come back alive from his next labor, but that is an exaggeration. To say the same of Alcestis is the only rational response to her death. Heracles' extraordinary life, facing dangers from which no other man would be likely to return alive, does underscore this aspect of Alcestis' extreme heroism. No other mortal woman returns to the light.[164]

Heracles' role in general is generically confusing. Is it comedy, satyr play or tragedy? Part of his heroism is that he is at home in all three genres. As what Arrowsmith calls a "modal frontiersman" he breaks through even these literary definitions. In the present scene his role is multiple. It is to all these roles that Admetus responds. The man is his friend; otherwise to deceive him would be hardly worth the effort and emotional pain. Heracles himself is a better than adequate host when he is at home, in Argos where a lot of drinking is done (559–60).[165] On the other hand, he has been built up as a hero, with his own very particular story and his own special δαίμων. By persuading Heracles to stay, Admetus is able to turn him into the generic and casual guest who will then have to be transformed back into the larger than life (or death) figure needed for the happy ending of the play.

Admetus contrives to keep Alcestis alive for one more scene by preventing the spread of knowledge of her death. The arrangement

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[163] Segal (1993):74; Rabinowitz (1993), especially 73–84.

[164] Except poor Eurydice. But the stories are so different. The rescue of Eurydice is unsuccessful and it depends entirely upon her husband's love for her. Alcestis has already established her own claim to immortality of memory and heroic status. She and her husband work together as creatrix and creator, but still they need the power of Heracles to accomplish the resurrection.

[165] 560, Ἄργους διψίαν . . . χθόνα.

of scenes earlier had kept her alive for almost two full episodes after the arrival of Death inside the house. The exangelos had announced no *event* but given a description that communicated the *ethos* of Alcestis. Her death had been delayed so that she could have a memorable part in her own story. Following the cue given by the maid ("she is and she is not")—which of course Admetus did not hear—Admetus, by saying "there is a twofold μῦθος to say about her," delays his wife's death for a little while, but only in the mind of his friend. Two statements (at least) can be maintained about anything, but Admetus is unquestionably meant to be seen as equivocating rather than philosophizing. And yet by the very utterance of the word ἔστιν (521) he manages to initiate his part in the process of resurrection. Heracles goes along with what must seem like needless quibbling about existence, but which must also relax the tension of the questioning that began at line 512. Surely (Heracles would think, as would any casual guest) Admetus would not indulge in this sophistic nonsense if anyone close to him had died. Admetus' generic statement about the mortal condition (527) in effect denies the existence of *life* for mortal creatures. Heracles' unequivocal affirmation of life (528) lets the conversation go forward. Having assured himself that the deceased is not vital to his friend's life and happiness, Heracles continues his questioning and avoids understanding the obvious meaning of Admetus' words. Heracles' question (at 532) suggests a way that Admetus can deceive without actually lying. Alcestis was both συγγενής and ὀθνεῖος to him, though the words about her status in his house are hardly communicative. She was distantly related to Admetus[166] but she also came as a bride from another's house.[167] Throughout (except for lines 531 and 533) the generic masculine is used and often the generalizing plural or a genderless third person singular.[168] The particular subject is avoided. Admetus disingenuously keeps Heracles in the dark through the usual and useful means of grammatical and semantic ambiguity.[169] Although in a way he separates her death from her, he manages to do this without diminishing her heroism.

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[166] See L. J. Elferink, "The Beginning of Euripides' *Alcestis*," *Acta Classica* 25 (1982): 43–50 (49). I think the fact that they were related is a red herring.

[167] There is no reason to suppose that Admetus is not being truthful about Pelias' death, a well known story, made better known by Euripides himself (in his earliest play).

[168] Cf. Pomeroy (1975:100) on *Antigone*.

[169] It is there, at the center of the play, rather than at the end of the *Alcestis* that

The double μῦθος (519) in a sense is, or is becoming, true. The point of Admetus' long speech promising eternal fidelity (and more) to his wife is that she still *is* his wife. And she is still in his house (though "just dead in his house" as the chorus reminds him, 599–600). She is in transit between worlds[170] so that the διπλοῦς μῦθος makes some (if slight) ritual sense. Finally the almost sophistic equivocation makes the truth—what turns out to be the truth—possible. Theatrical magic—in part helped out by the double role of the audience[171]—creates the illusion, allows Admetus' equivocations to become the only truth.

What is accomplished in the first Heracles scene? In a manner of speaking, Admetus does become the Orpheus figure, the poet or creator he wished he could be. He has kept his wife alive, even resurrected her in Heracles' mind, while at the same time blurring the distinction between life and death. He has planted the seed of a second story about her. He has substituted a generic female dependant for his wife's corpse, paving the way for her anonymous return and suggesting a plot to Heracles, who, though an excellent fellow and wise in the knowledge of how to live, is no Oedipus when it comes to reading riddles nor is he experienced at equivocation. In his role as Orpheus, Admetus will not look directly at his resurrected wife until she is firmly in hand, though even then Admetus will use the wrong mythical hero (Perseus, slaying the Gorgon) to compare himself to. In sum, Admetus' words in this scene have invented a second μῦθος that Alcestis is *not* dead. Without Admetus' unselfish hospitality, Apollo's prophecy would have to go unfulfilled.

The assumption is made by Admetus that the dead are somehow

Alcestis becomes "a creature with no heritage" as Nielsen says so perceptively, but, I think, of the wrong part of the play (1976):100. Literally it is true that she is an outsider and the fact will become a matter of concern (and brief but inconsequential reflection) when Pheres speaks of revenge from her paternal hearth. That is, nothing comes of Pheres' threatening prediction, but it is a nearly tragic conclusion to Admetus' denial of Alcestis' connection to him and the house and it helps place this story generically by saying what it is *not*, through a hint of what might have been in another kind of story. Luckily there is another conclusion, when Heracles brings back the "stranger."

[170] See Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death*, Ithaca, 1985:38ff.

[171] As interested emotional participant and as an intelligent body who can be counted on to know the story, to recognize the appropriate type-scenes, and to reflect upon them in ways guided by the author through his use of tradition and variations on it and through the general reflection in song and speech of his chorus and characters.

alive *there* in the house of Hades, carrying on a life not unlike the one here in the light. This assumption turns out to be not altogether false in terms of the play's eschatology. Alcestis can be saved because she is not absolutely and irrevocably dead: there is a someone there to be restored and a place to be restored to. Again, the second *muthos* is not a lie. In several ways she is still alive, though not in the Verrallian rationalist sense that her death was faked as a kind of play within the play. In Admetus' conception of death, his wife—though not present to him—is seen as still carrying on her uxorial duties. And he is still present to her consciousness as she is to his. She will carry on in her dark world, preparing for his arrival. He will at that time reverse the usual practice of female exogamy and go on his last journey to join her there. In his deception of Heracles he has prevented knowledge of her death from dampening the ebullience and taking away the happiness of his friend.

Third Stasimon

The issue has been skirted. Knowledge is kept from Heracles. In the first two episodes, knowledge of the destined day had taken away hope. Now Heracles' ignorance delays the fulfillment of our renewed hopes or skeptical curiosity. This delay lasts for almost two full episodes, rather like the delayed death. Perhaps there is a minor miracle in this scene (maybe even two): the persuasion of Heracles to enter the house and the persuasion of the chorus that the former was something to be admired. The chorus balances its earlier "sad song" with this beautiful picture of that other famous guest, Apollo, playing mating songs to the animals, bucolically masquerading as Orpheus.[172] This is a hopeful song, a celebration of hospitality and wealth, of the masculine side of the οἶκος. But just as it ends with words of confidence, what do we see but Admetus escorting his dead wife from the house (the ἐκφορά). This beautiful, healing song introduces one of the most sordid scenes in tragic/pro-satyric drama, made especially repellent by the presence of Alcestis' bier over which father and son quarrel about responsibility for her death and the right to honor her.[173]

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[172] See Shirley Barlow (1971:19) for a lovely description of the lightheartedness and movement in this ode.

[173] For similarly repugnant but brilliantly accurate scenes of family vituperation

The house is hospitable and free. Apollo dwelt in its halls. And now the house has received a guest though in mourning. Such (or is it just that the perversity of the action requires some comment?) nobility gives the chorus confidence:

> Upon my soul confidence sits
> that a pious man will fare well.

These are not, I hope, the throwaway lines that Beye takes them to be.[174] This couplet is a cliché, but the context makes it an outrageously inappropriate general truth.[175] It is not the sort of thing to say to or even of a recent widower. The inept generosity of Admetus is matched by this generous but seemingly inane sentiment on the part of the chorus. Once again even though there is no hope, hope is kept alive. But now the arrival of Heracles has in fact given renewed hope and in a kind of happy (rather than tragic) irony, the chorus—though they cannot share the knowledge of things said in the prologue—does share the hope. The opening of the house to Heracles reminds the chorus of another son of Zeus who lived here (though not by choice) and who saved the house once (or thought he had done). This was the sublime musician Apollo. The thought of him looking like a picture of Orpheus surrounded by wild creatures gives the chorus renewed hope. But it is to be a rather unmusical son of Zeus who will be the Orpheus of the story and he will use force rather than the persuasion of song (or the infatuation of drink) to defeat Death/death. But Orpheus, we must remember, though he succeeded by his art in winning back his wife, failed to keep her safe.[176] Heracles will succeed where both Orpheus and Apollo failed, for Apollo's salvation of the house of Admetus was neither permanent

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cf. Medea and Jason in the exodos, quarreling over the responsibility for their little sons' deaths; Creon and Haemon; Agamemnon and Menelaus in the *Iphigenia at Aulis* fighting over the letter.

[174] Beye (1974):92. As Parry says (1978):157, the third stasimon "ensures that the mythically possible and the actually impossible, *logos* and *ergon* will co-exist in the final scenes."

[175] See Hesiod *Works and Days* 182–8 and 331–2 on the mistreatment of parents and treatment of guests in the present age. Admetus' threats to Pheres are reminiscent of these verses in Hesiod, making it rather difficult to think of him as a "pious" man.

[176] Or is Euripides thinking of another version of the Orpheus story in which Orpheus succeeds? See Emmet Robbins, "Famous Orpheus," in John Warden (ed.), *Orpheus: The Metamorphoses of a Myth*, Toronto, 1982:16; Charles Segal, *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*, Baltimore, 1989:18–19; Ella Schwartz, *Aspects of Orpheus in Classical Literature and Mythology*, 1984 Harvard diss.: 200, 211–213.

nor complete. One of the things that will irk the servant most and annoy him enough to tell Heracles the truth is his unmusical yelping (760), a not entirely inappropriate sound, since Admetus has forbidden music in his halls and throughout the kingdom (430–1). The two kinds of sounds do not mix. The servant is moved by considerations of propriety and aesthetics to air his disapproval both of the guest and implicitly of the host who received him.[177] The chorus has mixed the hospitality theme with the theme of property (the gifts, in fact, of the hated Pheres to his son), talking about the vast stretches of Admetus' realm (588–95) and by doing so they look forward to the Pheres scene where the discussion of property and inheritance figures rather too prominently to be in good taste (modern and urban, if not ancient and/or rural).

Fourth Episode

Admetus asks the chorus to hail his wife on her last journey. Instead they announce the arrival of Pheres bearing gifts. The treatment of him by his son is in keeping with, if more extreme than, Alcestis' attitude to the aged parents who refused to die.

Even Pheres will give Alcestis her due. Every scene enhances our knowledge of what she has achieved. He praises her with the various ethically loaded words the others have used of her (ἐσθλή, σώφρων, forms of τιμάω). Most of what he says has already been said by others and is general rather than individuating. What he adds of a more particular nature is what she did for *him*. She kept him from living to the end of his days as a childless old man.[178] Pheres' first speech extends Alcestis' benefaction: he could have died for his son, but the fact that he is alive—used as a reproach to him—means that Alcestis died for Admetus and for her children *and* for Pheres. It is, however, made very clear in this scene that the only person Alcestis died *instead of* is Admetus (v. 718). Only Admetus, as even he finally realizes after the funeral, has lived beyond his allotted time (939–40, 955–7).[179] Her death makes Pheres' life more pleasant or less unpleasant: it is

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[177] See Seaford's commentary on the *Cyclops*, 184, *ad* 425–6 on the scene of feasting and wailing as a *topos* of satyric drama.

[178] The fact that there are grandchildren means that his line is assured of continuing to the next generation, as much as any man can expect or reasonably hope for.

[179] Cf. Leif Bergson, "Randbemerkungen zur *Alkestis* des Euripides," *Eranos* 83 (1985):7–22 (esp. 12).

hard to imagine him enjoying life with the magnanimity and gusto of a Heracles, the aesthetic (that is to become asceticism) of an Admetus or the sense of self and family pride, loyalty, love, and courage of an Alcestis. Her death makes the lives of all women more glorious (623–4). She is the object of Pheres' gratitude. But she is also a subject: she has accomplished something noble, for herself, for what she was to herself and to others. Her own speech had made that clear too. She is not to be seen just as the *object* whether of gratitude, sorrow, or love. Alcestis had also died for herself, for her picture of herself. She suggests other possibilities that were open to her, but she did not choose the imperfect picture. Pheres is an intruder in Admetus' mourning and even more so in Alcestis' vision of her sacrifice. Her picture includes a self that steps into the masculine heroic world. Even though this is unstable and its fatal outcome is reversed, it does not mean that her heroism is erased. She is rewarded by being allowed an ordinary life in addition to a heroic death and miraculously after it.[180] Pheres' outrage is to generalize Alcestis, to take away her self. In this scene Admetus does the same.

The previous scene with Heracles had been one of denial. The physical absence of Alcestis is the crucial factor. Admetus in hiding the identification of the deceased was (519, 531, 533, 535), in a way, denying her an identity, transferring her death to an unidentified, anonymous other woman and separating Alcestis' heroic undertaking from her actual death (5523, 525, 527). The scene with Pheres in the presence of Alcestis' physical remains emphasizes her thingness, her separation from herself.

Admetus protects his wife from Pheres. But if Pheres is to be equated with the monster who is routed by the young lover,[181] it is too late and he is the wrong ogre. On the other hand Admetus keeps alive Alcestis' vision of what parents should be and what they should be willing to do. He echoes her words, expanding her three lines (290–2) into a long tirade. The echo of her speech makes Admetus' remarks to his father on getting more children (662) all the more nasty. Pheres is the generic old man in everybody's eyes.[182]

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[180] We might do well to remember Solon's happiest men and Socratic sleep.

[181] See Anne Pippin Burnett in *Catastrophe Survived: Euripides' Plays of Mixed Reversal*, Oxford, 1971:41–44.

[182] His son would turn him into Tithonus, the old but deathless man (713). But Pheres refuses to be the generic old man by insisting that his son include himself as well as his father in the whole γένος of humanity. All human beings love life

The bitterness of this scene may hint that both men are unable to face what they have done (or not done). For all that Alcestis is kept alive by being quoted, her deed, her perfection, are being overshadowed. Furthermore, Admetus' attack on his father who "should be dead" diminishes the value of Alcestis' free will offering. She did not (primarily) die for Pheres nor because he refused. His refusal made her offer possible.[183] The offer to die for someone is not generic but extraordinary. Pheres' own role helps to define what Alcestis undertook to do: he is grateful to her; her heroism is revealed more clearly by contrast to his pusillanimity and that of Admetus' elderly mother, but at the same time the impossibility of really and lastingly benefiting another person in this way is brought out into the open in this scene more than in any that has gone before. The mother of Admetus may actually be there among the mutes. If she is it would create a nice tableau of the elderly couple, a pair of self-satisfied survivors, in terms of cold logic, winners, but moral failures. Euripides has pleaded the old man's case for him well. Pheres may be right about his obligations to his son, and though not utterly without sympathy, he is not likeable. What makes him less likeable is the ungenerous way he tells his particular truth.

Throughout, the chorus has tried to preserve decorum. Finally they are able to return to the duty that had been assigned to them before Pheres intruded himself into the funeral. They end this scene and the movement with a farewell more in keeping with Alcestis' life and wishes. She would sit beside the bride of Hades (who gave up the light to be with her husband, who also returns to the light). An action has ended:[184] it began with the defection of Apollo and the entrance of Death. It ends with the dismissal of Pheres and the bearing away of Alcestis. Stage and orchestra are vacant.

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The quiet is broken by a servant from the house who comes out to report a scene as opposite as possible to the scene reported by the

(703–5). From Tithonus to Teiresias is an easy step as Pheres gets in his last gibe, an ugly prediction to his son.

[183] But what if he had offered, would his (unnamed) wife have died for him? Probably not: she is the generic old woman with neither a name nor a role. Or must I say *nearly* anonymous, for the Scholiast (*ad* 16) gives her the name *Klymene*?

[184] See Castellani (1979):487–96 for a careful and original treatment of the play's unique construction.

other servant.[185] Outrageous misbehavior is set against conformity to convention. Boisterous revelry against prayer and quiet self-reliance. We are given a glimpse of the male entertainment rooms in which the servants—the same ones who were only recently given a kind word one by one by their mistress—are bustling about waiting on this irksome and indecorous guest. In spite of the change in tone, Alcestis is never forgotten. The servant expresses conventional but deeply felt mourning for his dead mistress and adds a detail to her perfection to keep us admiring her goodness and to flesh her out a little more, by including the love others had for her (769–70), a salutary juxtaposition to the generalizing trend of the previous scene. Heracles offers a new view of the ideal life, chaotic and unplanned, an outlook that is essentially trite, but magnanimous. His attempt at generalization is cliché-ridden, boozy philosophastry, but what more can be done with universals in the human condition? His view of how life should be lived is at odds with Alcestis' more carefully and hierarchically planned system.

The servant dwells on trivialities, the details of the guest's behavior and his own and the other servants' reaction to his uncouth and inappropriate merriment. He does finally admit (815) that the timing is all that makes the guest's carousing out of place. The servant has polarized Alcestis and Heracles: her perfection is the criterion against which his absolute wickedness is set (766). Even Heracles cannot stand being judged by Alcestis' standards.

Ignorance is a necessary precondition of Heracles' behavior, but the negative consequences of this ignorance are ultimately trivial. Heracles acts in bad taste, to be sure, but does no lasting harm. On the other hand, by another theatrical sleight of hand, his uncouth behavior leads to the saving of Alcestis. Heracles' generalities, like those of others, are belied by the particularities of the story: timing, as always in drama, is crucial. What makes the servant sad—the shortness and instability of life—is just what makes Heracles suggest enjoying what life we have (788ff.). So small a thing—a sound hardly ever singled out for comment—as the noise of the wine splashing in the cup is enough to overwhelm sorrows (796–8). From the cup to

[185] The servant brings out of doors the sights, sounds, movements and tastes of the interior. Heracles, in turn reveals details of the servant's facial expression which are no more *there* than are the rooms behind the façade. See Seaford's commentary on the *Cyclops* (184) *ad* 425–6 on the scene of feasting and wailing as a *topos* of satyric drama.

the lip is all the time he will give to anticipation. Otherwise, "life is not life, but disaster" (802). Which is exactly what the sobered hedonistic (but nonetheless pious) Admetus has projected for himself in his new untried asceticism. Once Heracles knows the truth, nothing could be simpler. He does not bother with calculations or plans beyond ascertaining the necessary facts. He has the capacity of seeing everything at once: himself and his part (836–9), the place of Alcestis in her home (840–2), where and how to meet Death (844–5), an alternative plan should the first fail (850–3). Finally, he captures in a few words the aesthetic identity of Admetus, the man of hospitality (858–9). Heracles is not usually represented as one of the clever heroes, but he does have a kind of magnanimous wisdom lacking in the other characters in this play. The last perhaps is an exaggeration induced by the wine, but it would please his friend to be called the most hospitable of all the Greeks! At least it would have pleased him before the funeral of his wife, for even in his first scene with Heracles, he asserts with as little egoism as is possible his identity as a host.[186]

* * *

The Pheres scene between the two Heracles scenes—being central and pointedly so in the anular composition—is often considered the turning point or at least a major turning point in the play. From the father we learn much about the son, especially whence he acquired his sense of values and obligations: this is not unusual, where else does the next generation learn the basic values than from the older?[187] His talk of Hellenic custom gives him a special relationship to the audience: that Pheres should be the representative of τὸ Ἑλληνικόν (cf. 684) is somewhat disturbing.

Throughout the play everyone teaches Admetus.[188] In this scene as usual he does not learn the lesson immediately. The words he uses of his father as well as those his father uses of him come back to haunt him when he returns from the funeral. Only then does he

[186] On the combination of selfishness and selflessness in guest-friendship see Schein (1988):193. Lloyd observes (1985):127 that Admetus "does just the right thing: he receives Heracles but declines to enjoy himself in his company."

[187] The values expressed in this scene are not unlike the traditional values of Hesiod (see esp. *Works and Days* 334–82).

[188] See Jones (1948):52–5 on the technique of delayed reaction in the education of Admetus.

see himself with his father's eyes and he sees himself as the enemy he formerly felt his father to be.

Admetus drives away Pheres who has become the bogeyman and wins the right to be his wife's sole mourner from the household. He cannot, however, be said to have won the debate with his father. Pheres has the last word. Pheres has the best case.[189] It is *his* words that stay behind in the minds of the audience, the chorus, and finally Admetus. The "rhetoric of the situation" may require Euripides to give him the best defense possible, but it does not force him to make him so unkind. That, I think, is a concession to naturalism: in the heat of the moment people say more than they intend to, to pay back unkindness with equal or greater unkindness: this excess on Pheres' part is the only hint that his son's words have hit home, that he feels at all bad.

Once again Heracles shows that it is sometimes best not to be concerned with paying back in kind. Heracles is hurt when he finds out that Admetus has not shared his grief but instead has invited him to make a fool of himself (or worse) by carousing in a house of mourning. He sees that reciprocity is not so simple as Pheres, for example, makes it: he was mistreated, but he was also treated generously. He is able to get below the surface and recognize and maybe even invent the deeper generosity of Admetus' act of hospitality, and to pay this back with an even more magnanimous act. Here we have a man acting like the friend he has created (rather than like the ἔχθρός of his imagination). He does not feel the need to match the tactless act with an act of equal or greater tactlessness as Pheres and Admetus seem to feel compelled to do verbally. Heracles tests the "Hellenic custom" of Pheres and finds it wanting. Even though Admetus is chided by the chorus, criticized by his own servant, and gently but firmly reproached by Heracles, the nobility of his act of hospitality is also recognized by all. Only he diminished it by means of logic (553–60, 562–7). It is a particular act, as are Alcestis' and Heracles': they cannot be subsumed under the universal. Every act

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[189] See Dale *ad* 697: "Pheres wins on points with this superb speech, in its mordant wit hardly surpassed in Greek tragedy." And she adds, "the plot requires that Admetus shall be defeated here, so that when his temper has cooled he shall realize what the ill-disposed can make of his situation." Euripides, it is true, makes the best case for him. But he does more: he gives an argument for the value of life that had tended to be overlooked by Admetus in his misery. That is, Pheres' argument give the lie to his son's rejection of his life as worse than death.

of heroism is unique and therefore chaotic, subversive, miraculous.

The undeceiving of Heracles is like the deception. He participates fully in it. He begins with the generic woman unattached from the house and then moves to questions (as before) about the children and father and finally to the identification of Alcestis as the γυνή. The directions on how to find the tomb extend the space outward. Later the chorus and Admetus and Heracles will give us details about the funeral. But the main point of this discussion is the announcement of Heracles' plan, so that the audience will not be in doubt about the identity of the veiled woman (see Dale, *ad* 837).

Heracles rushes off to do what Zeus killed Asclepius for doing, initiating the whole series of events, at least in Apollo's version of the story, that make up the present *kairos*, thus creating a connection among these essentially separate stories.

7. *After the Funeral*

Kommos

"O hateful approach, hateful sight of my widowed halls." Admetus returns with the chorus. Once again attention is concentrated on the outside of the house. The sacrifice in a way has failed:[190] he has not survived his death. He envies the unwed, who have but one life, realizing now (883–8)—as his father suggested—that we must live for ourselves, that our happiness depends on ourselves (685–6). But Pheres' miserly world view does not take hold. Even at his most despairing Admetus does not wish his parents the emptiness of separation from each other.

Except for their story of a relative who lost his son (903–10), the chorus tries the same old consolations (e.g. 875, 876–7, 889–94, 926–33). They want very much to generalize this unique event. Alcestis' death, however, refuses to become the same old story.

The whole scene dramatizes the difference between then and now, not only Admetus' memory of his wedding, when first he came home

[190] As sacrifice is bound to do. See J.-P. Guepin, *The Tragic Paradox*: Myth and Ritual in Greek Tragedy, Amsterdam, 1968, pp. 177–8. With the fantastic return of Alcestis, *reason* wins out. Of course the audience knows that one person cannot die for another. Reason situated in the audience (and only there) helps to effect the resurrection, which of course is also impossible.

with his wife, an episode so unlike this approach to the house without her that each aspect of it has its analogue here (clothing, sounds, company in bed, 915–25), but all the other addresses to the house, Apollo's, the chorus' throughout the play. Admetus whose role as male is to mediate between his house and family and the outside world is completely at a loss now that the center of his house is gone. How much Admetus learns may be debatable, but the desperate, breath-taking pain of his return to the empty house means more than any lesson that he could put into words or into generalizations capable of being expressed as syllogisms. The details of her absence come close to being an expression of recognition of Alcestis as a person. We might call it the articulation of the other.

Ἄρτι μανθάνω, just now I understand (940). Admetus was fated to die (939: whatever that means; people do die and his was apparently to have been an ordinary death; such people are not the stuff of ancient drama), but having bypassed his allotted portion, he will live a joyless life. Finally, he comes to understand the consequences of the bargain he and his wife had made (940), something his wife's servant knew many scenes ago (197–8). The words of Pheres have pierced his heart and his ego. He admits at last that not only will he have a bad reputation, but he has done and fared badly (961). He views himself from the standpoint of a hostile outsider ("my enemies will say," 954, implies that they will say it and they will be right; it is also what his father has said, 694–8).[191] His father of course should not be an enemy; his father is by definition φίλος. If only such relationships were fixed. As in the *Hippolytus*, we are given the privilege of sharing that rare moment when a man takes his first feeble steps at self-awareness. Life and death have been his teachers along with the other members of the cast. Now he sees that "his enemies" will use his treatment of his parents against him. They will even use the fact that he is alive against him. Pheres' victory is that Admetus sees himself with his father's eyes. True (as Burnett so perceptively points out), in that earlier episode, at one level of Admetus' imagination, Pheres is the monster sent from the door but it was already too late and besides the old man won that contest. We may think of another empty victory: Apollo had tricked the fates, so he believed, but they tricked him back and he was not smart (or prescient) enough to see (or foresee) it.

[191] A possible echo of Hesiod (*W&D* 185–6).

Admetus is a man out of his element, hunting for a mythic archetype to explain his suffering to him (or perhaps just to share it) and more than that to be the hero who could save his beloved. The hero he explicitly wishes he could be is the artist Orpheus. But Admetus does not fit into any of the other, grander story patterns he tries on. He is not a warrior or a murderer or a grieving widow or loving sister. He is neither a parricide nor a poet. He is a rich Thessalian who likes to entertain on a grand scale and to enjoy himself, welcoming to all, god and slave alike and at once.

Just as important as Admetus' growing self-awareness is his nascent recognition of the other, of his wife. Who can he greet and by whom be greeted when he enters the house? By saying this he reminds us that Alcestis had a kind word for everyone (942, cf. 195). He pictures his loneliness, the desolation of the house in general (944) and the emptiness of specific places (945–6) that so fills the house that it will drive him out. That offstage, interior and mental, playing space is vacant now. He imagines the dirty floor, not just a homely domestic detail[192] but an important aspect of Alcestis' being as mistress to the servants. What is happening here is that Admetus is seeing the house from *her* point of view. The children (in his imaginary interior scene) are crying for their mother (947–8). The servants are crying for their mistress (948–9). He is beginning to accept her not just as his wife but in her other relationships. Not only Admetus is rewarded by her return. It is true that even female *protagonists* (which Alcestis is not) are presented as catalysts for the male action[193] and Alcestis does play such a role in "the education of Admetus." But here we do see a broadening of the perspective to include other points of view. These others, the children and servants, are mentioned here so that they can be omitted from the last scene.[194] They are nevertheless important to the creation by Admetus of Alcestis as a person of multiple facets and his situating her within the house just before her return.

This is the third description of the inside of the house. The others had prepared for it by making us imagine an interior and things happening in it as witnessed by completely reliable (however opin-

[192] Cf. Dale who speaks (*ad* 941–3) of "the unforced homeliness and pathos of this 'domestic interior' and Conacher (1988):192 (*ad* 947).
[193] See Zeitlin in Winkler and Zeitlin (1990): esp. 68–9 and 86.
[194] Dyson (1988):13.

ionated) servants, so that now we can visualize this scene while understanding that it exists only inside Admetus' mind and imagination. Admetus projects himself into the house that in body he is reluctant to enter. He is himself the unseen center looking around at the things of which he speaks. But he is looking at *her* places. The children are crying for *her*. *She* is the center of everyone's thought and feeling. Then, standing at the closed and forbidding gate of the house which he cannot bring himself to enter, he sees himself being driven out of the house. He pictures parties full of women, the contemporaries of his wife. Can there be a doubt that he is picturing *her* friends, the women whose company she would enjoy at parties? Surely he is seeing (for the first time) these events from her point of view. Like Heracles he would enjoy the festivities in the *andron* (the men's entertainment room) at the parties of the Thessalians.

As Alcestis had done earlier, Admetus sees their lives complete, hers perfect, his useless to himself and to everybody. Her value becomes more clear through this contrast. Like Achilles, Alcestis is able to prove her worth only by not being there. Admetus remembers the day of their wedding, the enviable equality of bride and bridegroom (920–1). And now the difference. Her life is now closed. Like Cassandra when she talks about Hector's fate in the *Trojan Women* Admetus reaches the strange (and yet it is something of a cliché in Greek) conclusion that his wife is better off than he: this would be her conclusion too. Her fate was luckier (935). No grief will ever touch her (937). She has "fair fame" forever (938). He has come to the moment Alcestis' maid predicted for him. He gives the details of his own life present and future to balance the two descriptions of the richness of her life. He faces emptiness both inside the house and outside, in her orbit and his own. His recognition of others' affection for her (947–9) is evidence of his growing sense of her as an agent, a subject, as something more than his wife, as having more roles to play than one. He has no life in his own house. His reputation is bad (954–61). He should be dead. That is the life of Admetus without Heracles. That is the first ending of the play. But the chorus does not file out after singing its last farewell to Alcestis.

The *kommos* is Admetus' only scene alone. We have been taken through his relationships as husband, parent, child, master, king and friend. In these outcries and in his speech, he too reviews them. Admetus remakes his life. Compare this speech (935–61) to the earlier one in which he promises his wife eternal mourning. There he

had talked about the "extras" he was going to give up, the things that made his life worth living in a comparative way. Now he is down to basics. He has learned a number of things in the play's time, as if he had started as a shell, the nameless (rich, heroic age, royal) man. He learns that his children love and need his wife more than they need him and the same goes for the servants. We know that this is true from the maid's account, from the children's reaction (189–90), from the second servant's statement (769–71). The house will not be cared for; he will not enjoy parties with his friends and so on. By saying these things, he shows what his wife meant to him, where she should be, what she should be doing. After the funeral Admetus complies with his wife's last request to him (377, "be mother to these children") by imitating her position with relation to the children (947–8). They will fall at his knees weeping for their mother, the difference being the difference in costume.

He sees his life missing her and what that means to him. In the play he has already seen what he projects. Finally he comes to a conclusion that makes the question "why did Admetus want to stay alive?"[195] not seem so fatuous as it might at first". What have I gained by staying alive?" (960–1).[196] Of course such a question can only have meaning to him now that he sees what it means to let another die for his continued life.

The chorus follows with a general reflection that is almost a parody of the chorus meditating on the meaning of life and the inevitability of death.

Fourth Stasimon

Nothing is greater than Necessity (965). This truism is followed by a list of things that are not stronger than necessity: the Orphic tablets, the drugs of the Asclepiads (966–71). The chorus' words of despair are full of names and images that once meant hope: Orpheus, Asclepius, and φάρμακα. Zeus and Necessity accomplish all things together. Even Zeus cannot bring the dead back to life.[197] The first

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[195] See Beye (1959):121. Although it hardly seems necessary for a playwright to tell his audience why a character wanted to stay alive, perhaps we are told indirectly why Admetus wanted to. This is a reason for our knowing what he has lost and what he has given up.

[196] On this line and the rhetorical questions in this passage, see Lombard (1987):23–4.

[197] But apparently Zeus has nodded to this or never approved of Apollo's interference in the first place (or the chorus is wrong).

antistrophe is addressed to Necessity, the second strophe to Admetus, and the second antistrophe contains an address to Alcestis at its end (1000–5). Alcestis' tomb will not be treated like the mound of the perished dead (995). They end with words addressed to heroes. Alcestis has become a blessed δαίμων, a powerful spirit for the good (1003). Hope must be kept alive, because by the end of their greeting, she is there in person!

The movement of the final ode parallels the movement in the play from the general to the particular (as is common in tragic lyrics). It is not the generic woman who has died, but Alcestis. And so the ode ends with an address to Alcestis (by an anonymous, generic traveller) just as she arrives in person with Heracles. Song, in particular *this* song, which sees Alcestis not gone, but present (though distant and somewhat abstracted) as a benign spirit, escorts her back. Song, here in the form of the *Alcestis*, by art restores Alcestis to life.

Exodos

Heracles enters with a woman. Nearly everything about her is described for the audience in the course of the scene. That she is young and lovely and looks like Alcestis (1050, 1062–3). She is heavily veiled like a bride.

Spells and drugs and tears do not bring back the dead, but toil does, and sometimes, maybe, art. Little by little Admetus sees this woman and little by little his words turn her into his wife. If he does not participate (physically) in the rescue, he takes the lead in the recognition.

For the first time Admetus refuses to accommodate a guest, refuses to receive the young woman into his house (1042–5, 1064, 1104): he realizes that there is something more important than honoring an institution. He fears blame from the dead woman (1060): he feels her alive and watching him—as in very truth she is.

Gifts of the gods, however, usually come unbidden. Heracles is not put off either by the chorus' negative expressions about his ability to capture the horses of Diomedes, nor by the impossibility of overcoming Death, although the inevitability of death is something which is, after all, central to his way of living and thinking mortal thoughts. His own logic will be no bar to doing the impossible. Wine inspired him to sing out of tune. The truth he speaks under the influence of wine is aphoristic, the kind of truth that is beautifully

expressed in drinking songs. But he is inspired too to defy the limits of mortality, to go beyond himself, to reject the sober reflection of the servant. For Heracles knowledge does not take away hope even in the most hopeless of situations.

Of his son's original marriage (a part of their lives that is over) to Alcestis, Pheres had said to Admetus (627–8): "I say such marriages are profitable, or it is not worth getting married at all." To him that is what wives are for. His son says: (646–7): "It is she alone whom I consider truly my mother and father." This is what parents are for. Of the men only Heracles acts spontaneously out of true friendship and gratitude without counting profits and losses. That is, Heracles is able to see not only what Admetus' act of hospitality meant to Heracles but what it meant to Admetus himself. What it meant to Heracles was short-lived merriment, followed by extreme discomfort; but it was more positive to Admetus, a way of saving something of his old respectability and that of his house. Heracles is able to revise his assessment of the situation and to act. And Admetus too begins to see things better. In the intensity of his grief and remorse he begins to see what his wife—her life and death—meant to him, more than the dirty floors and empty bed. And he begins to recognize what she was to herself and others. He begins to see both her and himself as persons, as subjects. Things happen to Admetus. Only in his grief does he take the initiative, declare himself maker of his life, even if what he makes of his life is a living death. He will give back (almost) more than she gave: he has condemned himself to a life that is worse than death, but at least it is of his own making.

In the midst of death there is life. Admetus had seen Alcestis' life in Hades as more real than his own. There is a purpose to her existence: to wait for him, to make a home for him, to prepare for the time when he will join her after his waiting is over. "Time will soften it," says Heracles, "but now the wound is still new." "You would be right in saying 'time' if time is to die" (1085–6). But time is to live. He still sees his wife as bound by time, but himself as stuck in a timeless non-being. The numerous negative words[198] used of

[198] For example, ἀμήχανος, 202; ἀβίωτος, 242; ἀνόνατος, 412; ἄσημος, 522; ἀναιδῶς, 694; ἀπειρόκακος, 927; ἀψυχία, 956; he envies the *un*married and child*less* (882) and even calls his parents childless (735); he is said to seek the impossible (202); he will live an unlivable life (242); he married in vain (his own child tells him this, 412); his communication is meaningless (522); he acted shamelessly in avoiding death (694); his grief is unendurable because he is inexperienced in suffering (even his former

him go far in eliminating not only his pleasures, but all that gives him being. Part of his promise to reciprocate her favor to him is that he will become unstuck in time. Throughout the time they are separated he will be unchanged. He will live out his life in a sort of shadowy reminder of the time he was truly alive with her. Admetus seems to survive his own death. But does he really?

> Who knows whether to live is really to die
> but to die is accepted as being alive? (frag. 639N)[199]

Admetus is alive in body, but he is at home in neither world. He sees himself in limbo rather like an unburied and unmourned corpse, unable to enter the house, unable to remain in it, unable to leave it.

At first the woman Heracles brings is just a generic woman won in a contest (1020, 1024–32) and that is almost all she is even to Admetus when he asks that she be taken away (1042). Any woman in the halls will remind him of his woes (1045–7). Then perhaps Admetus takes a closer look, for he sees that she is young (1049–50). But still he does not look directly at her: it is her clothing and adornment that indicate a young woman (1050). He had dreaded the young wives of his friends whom he would look at in this initially impersonal way.

He begins to talk about his late wife and what he owes her (1058–61). This woman has reminded him so strongly of his wife that he even mentally puts her in his wife's bed (1055, 1059). He is having difficulty separating the two women, this γυνή and his wife. In physique she is like Alcestis and he is in turmoil and tears (1061–8). Mentally he places the stranger woman in his house (1049) and as if she were the statue he had earlier planned to commission, he moves her about, finally settling her in his wife's chamber, a notion he rejects forcefully.

When at last Admetus agrees to let the woman stay (1108; and this only after he has been declared πιστός, 1095), Heracles is very precise about how she is to be received. It is not the house that is to receive her, but Admetus must take her in his hand, as he did when first she came to be his bride (1111, 1113, 1115, 1117; cf.

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happiness becomes a negative factor, 927); and finally he accuses himself, seeing himself with an enemy's eyes, of cowardice (956, ἀψυχία).

[199] Cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1477, 1082.

917).[200] She is not to be a household fixture, but his wife. Admetus recognizes a change in himself and his life (1157–8): he will live better from now on. Such reconciliations are not a consistent or even a usual feature of tragedy, though the sense of closure, or completeness is. This is partly because tragedies always start near what is known to be the end or an end of a story (a serious story, treated seriously) and *something* happens. Something happens that makes this a complete action: Admetus takes his wife by the hand and enters the house with her.[201]

It is not until he touches her that the recognition is complete. It is another example of the magic of theatrical deception. At first Admetus had seen only the costume. He must take the stranger by the hand, and look at her mask under the veil in order to know that it is really his wife. The real person under the costume and mask is doubtless not the actor who played Alcestis in her scene. She may be played by a speechless supernumerary, but all attention is on her. She *is* Alcestis. Her death had been her heroic fulfillment as a woman and had made the lives of all women more glorious. And it had made the life of one man unlivable. Her death is used to examine certain assumptions about relative values, including assumptions which she herself had made. Her return to life has made Admetus a better man. He has been allowed to learn from his loss. But surely, it means too that she can continue her perfect existence, enjoy the things that gave her pleasure, be present at her children's marriages, and comfort her daughter in her labor. She can be the perfect wife the chorus had wished for at the end of the second stasimon and she can be alive too. If Alcestis lifts her veil in that coquettish gesture depicted on wedding vases there would be little doubt that this is a happy ending, a new life, and a new marriage for both Alcestis and Admetus.

Alcestis had been the intellectual author of her perfection and like a Muse had inspired in others the knowledge of her goodness and the desire to tell of it. Admetus has been the poet or craftsman who makes her come alive by supplying the matter, the second μῦθος about her, the false story that she is alive. It is he who gives the individuating features and characteristics to the generic woman brought back by Heracles. It is he who remakes Alcestis and situates her (as

[200] On the wedding, see Halleran (1988), Buxton (1987):17–19, Luschnig (*Dioniso*, 1990):36–39.

[201] With Halleran (1988):123–9 I would keep 1119–20.

she had seen herself) in the home and in both their lives just before her return. He brings her back by becoming more like her.

We have here at the end a three person scene. But it shifts subtly, dividing itself among three two person groupings. Heracles has entered with a woman, pretending she is *his* woman. Admetus refuses her, he and Heracles forming the speaking twosome while the woman stands silent. Finally only the real couple is left. The third person had been invited to stay, but graciously leaves the scene (leaves the *oikos* to the newly reunited pair). The last scene dances back and forth gracefully, delightfully, teasingly.[202]

8. *Who is that masked woman?*

Generic tales, general truths and lies

We know that such things do not happen. In life bargains cannot be struck with death. Even the folktale element does not live up to generic expectations. Other monsters—lions and hydras and boars (and feeble old men)—can be beaten, but the monster Death cannot be wrestled with and thrown. Within the mythological frame, however, is a reality, a real death, presented as a gradual weakening, real mourning, real hatred and real friendship. We see real people bartering what is most dear and acting from a distorted sense of values and ranks. Life cannot be lived only as a set of rules and obligations. Admetus

[202] The play alternates between one and two person scenes.

Apollo / Apollo and Death
Maid Servant / Alcestis and Admetus
Heracles / Heracles and Admetus
Admetus / Pheres and Admetus
Man Servant / Man Servant and Heracles
Admetus / Admetus and Heracles and Alcestis

There are problems with the relationships in all the two-person scenes: Apollo and Death are as incongruous as two divinities can be and each feels unfairly treated by the other; Admetus and Alcestis do not manage to communicate beyond making demands on each other; Admetus deceives his friend; he disowns his father and his father calls him a murderer; the man servant calls the best of men the "worst of men"; Admetus and Heracles are not the couple. Finally the right couple has the stage for a moment and the right couple enters the house to form or re-form their marriage. How does it affect our feelings (or does it at all?) when we realize that the resurrected Alcestis is not the actor who played Alcestis before she died, but a different man, an extra, a mute? Admetus claims to be a better man. That is, he is the same actor but a new person; Alcestis is the same person (with newly recognized value), but a different actor.

learns, from tasting grief, that he is not exempt from misfortune and death. He learns to live spontaneously, even breaking his own rules. His final invitation to Heracles is different from his first. He invites his friend to join in his happiness. Heracles' refusal reminds us that this story is not central to everyone's life. It is one particular story, connected by chance and design, both human and divine, to other stories, some true and some false. Heracles' generalized story of a public festival at which he won a woman as his prize is a story, like Odysseus' lies, that could be true and might very well be true, but is not true of this particular instance. In the traditional story Admetus had with Apollo's help won Alcestis to be his bride and so Heracles' false story is a parallel to Admetus' own past victory. Heracles' greater victory over death/Death is first presented as a much more commonplace event. The chorus had sung of a kinsman who lost his only son, showing that the chorus too has a story, a life beyond the present drama and is not confined to uttering clichés and general reflections. This example of grief—though it claims to be personal (but one step removed from the actual speakers)—is a generalized (and ironic) consolation to Admetus, but it is also a parallel story to one of the other possibilities that were open to the characters in our play before the beginning of the drama before they invented this truth. If Admetus had not made the rounds of his friends, if nature had taken its course, that would have been an exact parallel to Pheres' story. We know that Pheres would have been sorry, but it is also apparent that he would have gone on living.

If Admetus had not honored the institution of hospitality even in his imperfect way, he would not have gotten his wife back: this is one of the play's disturbing, disjunctive elements. Apollo had promised that Alcestis would be restored by a guest received in the house. Partly because his grief is unbearable to him and inappropriate, even ludicrous, we are glad when Admetus gets her back. And he succeeds partly because he has kept her alive in his infectious hope in seeking what was impossible, keeping her in mind in various ways, extending what was in his mind into the mind of Heracles, and in his reciprocated generosity in protecting his friend from knowledge that would have diminished his pleasure. Our favor (as well as our reason) is part of what makes this happen. The love of others for Alcestis, the desire that she be able to live her life, helps to restore her.[203]

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[203] There are, of course, other ways of looking at the resurrection. See, for ex-

But we cannot say that Admetus deserved to get her back. Taking the *Alcestis* as an "inverted tragedy",[204] we might say that Admetus experiences an undeserved reversal in his fortunes from bad to good. Earlier (246–7) he had complained about his undeserved suffering, but he had not been altogether innocent: he had done something. He had asked people to die for him. And one of them had done it.

The chorus feels around for the right things to say, but the old clichés, the tried and true consolations do not work. For this is not every man's story.

Admetus is a unique individual. He is favored by the god Apollo and has married the world's best wife. He is rich and happy. Only when all that happiness is taken away from him does he see what it meant to him. Better not to have the favor of the god if that means receiving gifts that break the heart. Better not to have the world's best wife if the proof of her goodness is that she will be forever separated from her husband. When Admetus reenters his house holding his wife's hand in his he is at last free of the mythological interferences that distorted his life. Now he can be an ordinary husband, father, child, and friend. And if he is lucky he will pass the rest of his life unnoticed by the gods and unfavored by them beyond what is open to men and women. For Admetus is not the right kind of person to test the boundaries of human existence. He is the right kind of person to be happy.

With his invitation to celebrate, he returns to the genre in which he belongs, the Athenian *skolion*,

> Drink with me, be young with me, be in love when I am in love, wear a crown with me
> Be wild with me when I am wild, be sober with me when I am sober (Page, *Lyrica Graeca Selecta* 456),

a sentiment he had forgotten when he was sad and sober, but remembers now when he has reason to be festive.

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ample, O'Higgins (1993):78, who sees the restoration as a "regression to the suspect automaton which instituted and defined the race of women." I hope not.

[204] As Lattimore does (1955):4. Lattimore writes that Admetus "has one significant *virtue*, which saves him." This is seen as a kind of reversal of the tragic flaw. I agree that Admetus' hospitality plays a part in his salvation, but believe that his happiness is still undeserved. Whose is not?

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CHAPTER TWO

ELECTRA'S POT AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF THE ONSTAGE AND OFFSTAGE SETTINGS IN EURIPIDES' *ELECTRA*[1]

Electra wakes the air,
shakes stars down their strings . . .
Pamela Alexander

1. *The Pot and Alienation*

Euripides' *Electra* is so full of physical objects and of persons, things, and words from everyday life that some critics[2] have had genre-identification problems with the play, supposing it to be a mixture of comic and tragic elements or even going so far as to call it a comedy. And there can be little doubt that it contains a much more thoroughgoing parody of earlier versions of the story than the one scene that is an obvious mockery of the recognition scene in the *Choephoroe*.[3]

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[1] A shorter version of this chapter has been published in *Dioniso* 62 (1992):7–27.

[2] And I agree that the everyday objects and feelings give this play its special character. See, for example, Jebb (especially lii of the introduction to his edition of Sophocles' *Electra*, 1907); Adams (1935:120–22) who sees the play as "a deliberate assault on legend"; Winnington-Ingram (1937:52) who calls it "a highly satirical play"; Knox (in "Euripidean Comedy", 1979:251–6 on the *Electra*); Goldhill (see especially chapter 10, "Genre and Transgression"); and Michelini (1987: *Elektra*: the 'Low' Style," 181–230). Even the titles of the last three works are suggestive of the view that the play is something other than a tragedy. These critics are, however, kinder to the play than Schlegel who could find little more than the scar of Orestes to admire, and more recently Vickers (1973:558–66) for whom the play falls to pieces at the end. But see Rivier (1975:119–24) who with characteristic perceptiveness stresses the importance of the setting to the central contrasts that give the play its meaning; cf. Webster (1967:144) and Fitton Brown (1961:369–70) on the realism and contemporary setting of the play; Pucci (1967:369–71) on contemporary notions of evidence and proof.

[3] Which I accept as authentic. As Hammond says (1984:380) "Euripides used spectacular features in other parts of his play to parody similar features in the *Oresteia*." Of course many critics want to remove that scene, and Hammond's most valuable contribution to the debate is to show how the recognition scene can be viewed as of a piece with the rest of the play. For various views of the scene in question see Kovacs (1989), who believes that the infamous lines (518–44) are the work of a competent professional, but *comic*, poet; Bain (1977) who argues that additions to

Electra, dressed like a peasant woman and a poor one at that,[4] comes out of the stage building (54) which represents not the expected and traditional place of the revenge on Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the palace of the Atreidae, but a poor man's cabin,[5] a suitable dwelling for a ditch-digger or herdsman, as Orestes later points out in stunned tactlessness (252), carrying on her head a water jug (55), probably utilitarian coarse ware, a familiar item in town and country. That prop and the action which it accompanies will probably remind the audience in a disturbing, disorienting, way of the parodos of the *Choephoroe* when Electra and the slave women of the household appear (22) with the vessels for libations, but, like everything else, the later play coarsens or perhaps, better, humanizes this object.[6]

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dramatic texts are more common than deletions; West (1980) who believes that "the passage is largely interpolated, but by Euripides himself." For more positive views of the authenticity of the passage see Bond (1974: "not proven") and Donzelli (1980). Fraenkel (1950:III, 815–26) wanted to remove the footprints from the *Choephoroe* and that would effectively excise them from Euripides as well, but Lloyd-Jones (1961) convincingly dismisses his arguments. Others, for example, Pucci (1967) and Arnott (1981), find in the scene relevance to the character of Electra in that she shows her distorted view of herself and is in error about the nature of evidence. For a thorough analysis of the scene and Electra's arguments see Paduano (1970).

[4] Shabbier than the women (young women of citizen stock, who like Electra, live far from the capital) of the chorus, for example, who offer to lend her clothes and accessories for the festival of Hera. She talks of her rags and must have been generally unkempt. The chorus, however, is not (as is asserted by, for example, Kubo [23]), on its way to the festival of Hera which is to take place in two days (171 and Denniston *ad loc.*), but has, as the members say, come to bring the news of the festival to Electra. For the thematic relevance of the festival of Hera, see Zeitlin (1970) and Foley (1985:43–5). On the materialism of Electra see Thury (8–13): it is true that Electra interprets much in material terms and that there is emphasis on physical things, but, I believe, in a typically Greek manner. On the insistence on physicality and corporeality see Mulryne (1977:43–6) and Segal (1985:7–23).

[5] The cabin itself has been already identified and given a setting by the farmer who opens the play and calls on Inachus, usurping a traditional invocation of Orestes'. This farmer takes the role of the watchman and the chorus (of the *Agamemnon*) and of the *paidagogos* (of Sophocles' *Electra*), but significantly he turns out to be at a greater remove from the action than any of them. Simply, he has nothing to do with the story. What he leaves out of his account is more interesting than what he puts in until he gets to line 34 and introduces himself.

[6] See Hammond (1984), 380–381 who believes that "Aeschylus' Electra carried the urn on her head and that her dancing with it and her pouring from it were memorable features of the production" of the *Choephoroe*. Euripides, then, deliberately parodies that scene according to Hammond. I tend to agree with Hammond's suggestion that the parody (or more trendily, the intertextuality) is much more pervasive than just the introduction to the recognition scene, but less with the motive he attributes to Euripides (386). See also Giuseppina Basta Donzelli's charming and persuasive remarks on *momenti nodali* and *sceni di effetto* which she compares to the

Euripides' Electra is performing an action (56) that is concerned with the living, not the dead (as Electras usually do), from whose memorials in this play she and other characters who will come on later are geographically removed: for there is no tomb in sight to be honored whether sincerely (by the children of Agamemnon) or hypocritically (by his widow who also lives far from the tomb in this play).[7] And yet, like their counterparts in the other versions, the siblings (and indeed the murderers too) are obsessed with their dead, an obsession which causes disturbances in their relations with the living: Electra more so than Orestes, who, we feel at the beginning, might be content with the obligatory ritual at the tomb (which he has already performed in his fictional past, 90–92) and, though he says he means to kill the killers of his father (89), is not sure that this is the right time for it, is at a loss how to do it, and has come to the wrong place for a serious attempt on the palace and its inhabitants. For certainty about the need for revenge and the timing of it he needs Electra's witness and stimulus: the coming together of all the actors and not just her wish that it were so makes this the ἀκμή (275, cf. 684). The old man will provide the requisite information for the *modus operandi*, including the knowledge that turns this anonymous young man into Orestes and Orestes into the avenger and information about the usurpers' absence from the palace.

Electra, in drawing and carrying water for the household, is also working for a new *oikos*, not her natal family from which both she and her brother are now and will be permanently separated.[8] She will join the family of Pylades, a mixed blessing, as any marriage is for a woman, but the ambivalence is exaggerated in her case because of the distant exile from her fatherland and separation from her brother, the last survivor of her family. And her brother after undergoing further homelessness and an ordeal (of large but hardly

traditional stories of the Sicilian *cantistorie*. In general on the humanizing spirit of Euripides, see Ronnet (1970, esp. 312, 315, 320). See also Tarkow (1981, esp. 144–6, 153) on the scar of Orestes as an emphatic example of reality contrasted with reputation.

[7] That is, the tomb, even though it is not there, has been displaced. It is not near the new setting, nor is it near the old setting.

[8] As will be made known in the words of Castor and in the pathetic action of their separate departures to distant places at the end of the drama. The ending of the play makes us review the beginning. She becomes once again, but only for the blinking of an eye a member of her paternal *oikos* when she is given in marriage to Pylades by her brother acting properly as her *kurios*. On the theme of the *oikos* and women's roles in general see des Bouvrie's major study (1990).

cosmic proportions) will establish a new settlement. The family of her birth will cease to exist. This is not true of the other Electra plays in which the theme of matricide is overshadowed ultimately (in the *Oresteia*) or throughout (in Sophocles' *Electra*) by the theme of the reestablishment of the "proper" rulers (Atreus' line) in Argos.[9]

A comparison of the vessels, their purpose and *ethos*, the various Electras use as props in the three extant classical tragedies which actually present[10] the revenge on the murderers of Agamemnon can add a dimension to our understanding of the character of each play.

In Aeschylus, Electra and the palace women come out carrying vessels for libations, fine ware suitable to a palace no doubt: the several vases illustrating the scene at the tomb show Electra sitting among painted pots (often decorated with theatrical scenes or images, one libation vessel almost surrealistically picturing only Electra's face/mask on a platform beside a funerary stele).[11] These libations, sent by a terrified Clytemnestra, form a link among all the members of the family, living and dead, and so work to the queen's detriment since she is now spiritually (though not physically as her dream shows) isolated from that family and even, though she had dominated the stage in the first part of the trilogy, from the action of the play (her part being small, but very physical) in the second member of the trilogy.

The opening scenes of the *Choephoroe* are at and near the tomb. Orestes begins the action of the play by offering locks of his hair to his father and to the nurturing river god Inachus.[12] Clytemnestra has

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[9] Matricide is the focus of the *Choephoroe* as is clear in numerous images, but not of the other *Electra*. A comparison of Clytemnestra's dreams makes this clear: Sophocles' masculine, dynastic dream is colorless beside the feminine, maternal and savage dream of Aeschylus.

[10] Or cover the time of it, since the murders, in accordance with tragic convention, all take place offstage, that of Aegisthus in Sophocles' *Electra* actually after the end of the play.

[11] For the illustrations see Trendall and Webster:40–44 Plates III.1, 1–7 (esp. 44:III.1.7).

[12] In Aeschylus he actually does in the play's time, the dramatic present. We see and hear him offering locks to Inachus and to his father. In Euripides, it is the farmer (who makes his living from the land, rather than Orestes who is not to be reintegrated into this country) who calls on Inachus. Orestes only narrates the visit to the tomb as part of a past that does not happen in the play's time. This fictional past reenters the plot just before the recognition, but is (ironically) rejected as proof of the presence or identity of Orestes. In Sophocles, Orestes creates a fictional future for himself, saying that he is going to the tomb to place the offerings. He does this instead of waiting to meet his sister early in the play. Euripides' timing allows

dreamt of Orestes as a serpent at her breast drawing her blood (*Cho.* 527–33): so at least her son, just come from an oracle that gave him a vivid picture of what would happen to him if he failed to avenge his father, interprets that visceral dream (540–50). An uncertain but easily persuaded Electra is taught by the chorus to use the libations against her mother 109ff.). Electra finds Orestes' hair at the tomb and the recognition is quickly and brilliantly effected:[13] the affectionate recognition of brother and sister is an entirely happy event; only later do negative elements and doubts concerning the revenge (which are present in Euripides from the start) come in. The *kommos* at the tomb reunites Agamemnon with his descendants and revitalizes him as an ally at least in the characters' will (esp. 489, 495).

In Sophocles, the pathetic scene of Electra with the urn of her brother's ashes (as she is led to believe)[14] was also famous in antiquity[15] and signifies her absolute isolation at her lowest point, denied even the right to mourn her brother whose death has robbed her of all hope. And then once the urn and with it his death are taken away from her reluctant hands, her joy becomes as great as her sorrow had been.[16] The libations in that play are brought by her docile and easily diverted (466) sister who finds the lock of hair at the wrong time for it to be an efficacious or straightforward element in the recognition, but it does provide the opportunity for a chillingly (and, needless to say, perfectly Sophoclean) ironic scene in which the truth is utterly stifled by the stronger personality.[17] It is Electra

Orestes to be in place to meet the woman who turns out to be his sister, though he has little reason to suppose that he should have come exactly to her house. Coming just to the border is in character for him, just as getting Electra as far away as possible is in character for Aegisthus. It is in character, too, for Electra not to leave herself unidentified for long.

[13] For a comparison of the recognition scenes in the three versions, see Solmsen (1982) *passim*.

[14] Or, better, as they are for her (the character Electra) as the story of Polus' invention of method acting confirms for us.

[15] For an illustration see Trendall and Webster 66–7 (plates III.2, 5) and note also Aulus Gellius' story of the fourth century actor Polus' handling of this scene, VI.5.

[16] On this scene see Dingel, (347–67 in Jens, *Bauformen*, 1971): 355–6 and Bremer (1991):332–3.

[17] In Euripides' *Electra*, Electra, giving in to the more powerful man, a stranger whom she quite naturally fears because of her isolation and his unorthodox approach (and who, for her is *not* Orestes) says, "I am altogether in your hands, for you are the stronger" (227). Such words could almost equally be said of Sophocles' Electra by Chrysothemis, who—where it is physically possible—allows her will to be bent by her stronger willed sister.

herself who schools her sister in redirecting the libations and prayers against their offerer (431–458).

In Sophocles' play, the pot sent by Clytemnestra and bearing the hypocritical libations and the second pot (not) bearing ashes of the (not) dead Orestes have to do with the nature of truth and knowledge of it (an important theme in that play as in all the Electra/Orestes tragedies, in Sophocles' and Euripides' more than Aeschylus') and both figure only by indirection in the recognition. A false story has been planted in the Sophoclean Electra's mind by the vividly detailed messenger's speech. A lock of hair laid on the tomb cannot compete with that brilliant but fictitious report of the fatal accident.[18] Electra must, therefore, accommodate this lock of hair to what she "knows" to be true and so she invents an explanation (932–3), as she begins to direct the plot (the action and not only the *ethos* of the drama, 947ff.). Ultimately the role of the last of the Atreidae is denied her, but she does begin to rewrite the story with herself as the avenger and matricide, forcing her sister to show what she is not, a heroic liberator; but neither is Electra after all.

In the opening scenes of Euripides' *Electra*, the water pot is a symbol of Electra's displacement, both of her lost future (as the wife of a noble Hellene) and stolen past (as the much loved and loving daughter in the palace of her father). She goes not to pour out any liquid ritually on the grave but to draw water for ordinary household purposes.[19] As in the other two versions the first dramatically significant offerings at the tomb are made by Orestes (here and in Sophocles only by report before or after the event).

Tomb and palace are no longer together nor near the scene of the onstage action (nor even adjacent to the imaginary scenes of the crucial offstage actions). The second libations come not from the

[18] Clytemnestra (774) does ask for πιστὰ τεκμήρια (convincing evidence) that Orestes is dead before she escorts him into the house. She does not wait for the proof, however, but takes the messenger into the house, falsely confident that her desire, her prayers, her hopes have given her mastery over the truth.

[19] This may be seen as part of the upward (or alternating up and down) motion of the early part of the play, a subject for another time. In the midst of mourning there is life and the ordinary concerns of the living. On "the motion downward" that characterizes the *Choephoroe*, see D. J. Conacher, *Aeschylus'* Oresteia*: A Literary Commentary*, Toronto, 1987:103, "Thus, much of the early action of the play is directed *downwards*, to secure the allegiance of Agamemnon and of the infernal powers in general, both as destroyers and renewers of life in the world above." On this directional theme in the *Oresteia* in general, see Anne Lebeck, "The Endless Flow of Blood," in *The* Oresteia*: A Study in Language and Structure* (1971:80–9).

household of Agamemnon (another sign of displacement and familial alienation) but from an old retainer who is yet another exile from the palace who is passing the burial site and has with him the means for performing a ritual at the tomb. A realistic combination of chance and design are in play here. The old man has been summoned. He passes the tomb which has been placed there in the imaginary off-stage space between his mountain retreat and the farmer's cottage. He has brought the makings for a festive meal, a part of which can serve for honoring the dead patriarch of the family he once served. As it happens he also catches sight of Aegisthus preparing a feast on a property off the same road. The connection between the living and dead is thus situated in this almost comic old man, who (like the second shepherd-messenger in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*) is the only one who can make all the connections. Otherwise the dead and the living of the house of Tantalus are scattered over the infinite offstage elsewhere, with Helen and Menelaus actually arriving in the port of Nauplia at the end of the action. Unlike the Clytemnestras of Aeschylus and Sophocles who send libations to the grave, Euripides' is dissociated from the tomb. It would not occur to her to go near it: she is—when she appears—an accommodating person, not given to the grand action. If she has bad dreams there is no one near enough to her who could share them with us. But she is no more free of her crimes than the other Clytemnestrae and regrets them sincerely in her unheroic, practical way. She has come a long way from Aeschylus' towering figure who welcomed Agamemnon home with blood-red tapestries and gloried in the rainfall of his spattering blood. It is easy to see why this Clytemnestra is not ever considered the sole murderer of Agamemnon nor much more than a co-conspirator. Her agglutinative and anachronic motives for killing her husband suggest that she can no longer summon up the feelings that drove her to murder.

Holding up the empty hydria (54–5), in her first speech, Electra addresses the dark night.[20] Electra's pitiful lament with the water jug

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[20] Cf. the importance of night and night's children in the *Oresteia*. Later, Electra greets the news that Aegisthus is dead as a light dawning (866–7). "O earth and night," she says there, "which I used to look on." Timing is explicit: the play like *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroe* and Sophocles' *Electra* starts at night (just before dawn); in this play day dawns with the arrival of Orestes who addresses its "white face". The matricide is perpetrated in the dark (the first murder is outside and though brutal and possibly impious (see Porter [1990]:277–80), it could have brought freedom to the house, if that were in the stars for the house of the Tantalids), in the sooty hovel where little light enters. In the *Agamemnon*, the signal flashes come just before

on her head is partly a pose (a dramatic, and even, with the actor admitting that the character is acting, a metatheatrical pose, a repetition of the dirge the character and the actor rehearsed last night): she does it to be seen (57–8)—she tells us this much herself—but the sorrow of the character is none the less real. That is, she asks the elements (and the audience) to look at her, a conventional request, and one that adds gravity to her lamentation. The farmer's speech has taught us to sympathize with her from the beginning, before we meet her (an important aspect of audience sympathy is its timing) because he feels for her and we for him, albeit in a way that is more curious than wrenchingly emotional.[21] We know from his speech what she has lost; we know how badly Aegisthus has treated her. The farmer has presented a simple picture. Only later does it turn out to have been inadequate to the complexity of the emotional and mythological situation and to the aesthetic identity of the protagonist.[22] For what have grand passions and hopes or even dissatisfactions to do with a rustic working man? But even he adds the detail that will later be so troubling when we see Clytemnestra. We must invent a truth that fits the multiplicity of things said and actions taken. For, we are told, lest we be too complacent in our disgust with this homicidal adulteress and unnatural mother, *Clytemnestra saved Electra* (28) from being murdered by Aegisthus.[23] Electra is still (in the *autourgos*' telling) an innocent victim in the ongoing dynastic struggles of the house of Tantalus[24] and in this particular case of greed, lust, ambition,

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dawn. In this play, Orestes once recognized is the signal fire (586–7), but ironically he has kept his identity hidden until it is revealed as a "bright mark" (559), trying to be an anonymous functional character (a herald, a guest), to Electra, playing the role of stranger he is used to playing to Aegisthus, but inside the house (like the Orestes of *Choephoroe* at the gate of the house) he must play the son and accept the relationship of his mother. The darkness and light in this play are strangely barren (like the characters, except for Clytemnestra).

[21] On sympathy for Electra and the various ways in which it is conveyed, see Cropp's excellent analysis (1988:xxxv–xxxviii with notes) and Lloyd's sensitive article (1986:2–19). See also Whitehorne (1978:7–9).

[22] The names of ancestors of which his speech is full are suggestive of older parts of the story: son of Thyestes, sceptre of Tantalus, daughter of Tyndareos. Thyestes will return in the golden lamb ode; Tantalus' name comes up again (1176); the naming of Tyndareos (13) may suggest the eponymous oath, especially in conjunction with Electra's many suitors (21) and Aegisthus' fear.

[23] Clearly she saves Electra by persuasion. Aegisthus goes on tolerating her presence and devises new plans for getting rid of her. Orestes, on the other hand, was saved by being physically stolen away from the murderous hands of Aegisthus.

[24] "The ancient sceptre of Tantalus" is mentioned at line 10; cf. 1175–6 where the chorus intones there is no house more wretched than that of the Tantalids. The

murder, war. The farmer lists all these crimes or acts of violence as part of the background. His "wife" has lost her father, her mother, and her brother. She is exiled from the palace and denied real marriage and children. She has been robbed of the affections of parents, siblings, and children that are rightfully hers to have and bestow or to expect. No wonder she is bitter. No wonder she is grateful to the one person who treats her with dignity and respects her former position.[25]

The displacement of the setting is a metaphor for the distancing of the characters from their deeds in addition to their alienation from each other; these two dislocations combine, I believe, to form the tragic essence of the play. Clytemnestra admits (1105–6) that she got little out of her crimes[26] and that she is not pleased with them. Electra with the chorus hears unidentified offstage cries far from the house (747ff), too far to be recognized and interpreted as such cries usually are, because usually they are inside the house, and she fears the worst as if failure were a real possibility. Orestes pretends he is not himself but his own messenger (as in the other versions, but, uniquely in this version, bringing the message that Orestes is alive, but is not present, is not he). He plays the role of a stranger (781ff) even as he

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farmer has a grasp on the dynastic aspect (lines 11–12 are almost a formula for royal succession), but this is left hanging when Argos is abandoned by the characters. The chorus comes to equate this formally simple peasant's cabin with the house of Tantalus; the deeds done inside make it so.

[25] Grateful, yes, but the marriage is unsuitable. Even in our more egalitarian age, it must be seen that Electra cannot be married to a nameless farmer no matter if he has Mycenaean ancestors, no matter if he becomes rich. He will remain a nameless farmer and as such has no place in the myth. Try as she may (by carrying water, by weaving, cooking, and preparing things within) Electra cannot be a χερνής (cf. 207). But see also Jones (1962:244), "the virgin-wife who is a king's daughter reckons herself inescapably the cottager's mistress." And she must remain *a-lektra* until after the vengeance. See Jones 245.

[26] Her luxurious *modus vivendi* makes her claim somewhat suspect, though she herself admits that the lovely Trojan slaves are a poor substitute for the child she lost (1001–3). They are her *geras*, a prize of war that might remind us of Agamemnon's insistence on a substitute for the woman he loses in book one of the *Iliad*. Clytemnestra flaunts these winnings, but her second daughter's poverty makes her ashamed of her luxuries and she sends them away to wait for her to be finished inside the house. Like Chrysothemis' easier life in Sophocles' version of the story, her sleekness betrays her compromised morals. The clash between her wealthy façade, a thin veneer on a commonplace character and her daughter's poverty combined with a heroic approach to life's disasters is what destroys both their lives in the long *chronos* of their biographies together and apart and in the *kairos* that ends it with death and despairing repentance in a story where repentance (far from being redemption) is failure.

commits the murder of Aegisthus (to be admitted to whose presence, as it turns out, he needs no excuse). He is lurking inside when his mother admits her folly and fear, a genuine condition, a genuine emotion. And most of all, the perpetrators *repent* after the deed at which Orestes was unable to look and even dropped his weapon and Electra put her hand (to guide and steady his) on Orestes' (1217, 1221–5). Orestes has come unprepared for action and he simply accepts the plans of others (and even feels their feelings, not able to admit they are his own, 290–1), letting even Aegisthus direct his actions (817–18). He accepts the identity each person gives him, actually becoming Orestes under the tutelage of the old man, pronouncing the name (850) as he achieves the identity offstage in front of the palace guard, once his father's, then Aegisthus', now his—if only in expectation—for the blinking of an eye. Orestes plays the allotted roles and does it with the technical skill required. He, most of all, is distanced from the deeds he does. His heart, it seems to me, is not in the roles assigned to him by others and by the tradition and only after the deed do we see a real Orestes, an Orestes who does not hesitate to feel remorse. Finally the Dioscuri dissociate the crimes from their perpetrators by blaming Apollo (1296–7) whose role (until Castor's muddy clarification) is less clear as a motivating force in this play than in the other versions.[27] At the same time, the murders seem to be undertaken from more personal motives (especially from Electra's point of view, which in turn adds to the discomfort of Orestes)[28] in this than in the other Orestes/Electra plays, a central paradox of the drama, vitally connected to the change of setting from the noble, grand and privileged, Cyclopean palace rank with murder and illicit liaisons to the common, sooty, deprived but (until now)

[27] Their blaming Apollo even for Electra's role is surely proof that their assessment is jejune on the human level. Apollo's role is hard to pin down. It is true that Orestes says he has come from "the mysteries of the god" (87), creating by these words a more distant past in the chronology of his immediate past actions, that count for him in bringing him to the present. We can take it that whatever the god said has some causal relationship to his being here at this time and to his purpose (88). But nowhere are we told that Apollo ordered Orestes to kill his mother, told him how to do it or what would happen to him if he fails or refuses. For an interesting interpretation of the role of the gods (Apollo and the Dioscuri) in Euripides' *Electra*, see Whitehorne (1978:5–14).

[28] Witness his doubled φεῦ (244), his four exometric φεῦς (262, 282, 366, 969), and one lone exometric ἔα (558). These show consternation over or admiration at various matters: his sister's husband's discretion, lack of greed, and even nobility, his sister's eagerness to kill their mother and his own distaste for the deed.

honest hovel. And yet in spite of the separation of brother and sister and, in general, of the people from the places that should be theirs and from the deeds they do or have done, in one respect they are less alienated from each other than the siblings in Sophocles' version. In Euripides, they plan and carry out the murders together, while in Sophocles the real plans are made without Electra and she is so far deceived that she makes her own separate plans which cannot but be frustrated.

In Euripides' play the old *tropheus* of Agamemnon replaces Aeschylus' Orestes' wonderfully human nurse. A certain amount of remembered physical intimacy is lost by having a male character in this role as it is in Sophocles' version, where the old retainer is all business and in fact makes it his business to quash expressions of affection in the recognition scene.[29] This (Euripidean) old man does talk very briefly about Orestes' early years, but the story is almost wholly functional and devoid of the particularities about the child or about the feelings of the old caretaker that would give it human interest, a fact that parallels the stage Orestes' assumption of the role of a generic character. He even talks in "philosophical" generalities and denies his real emotions as they break out (in, as it were, spontaneous and unrehearsed, rehearsals for the time when he can be himself) in tragic noises (244, 262, 282, 290, 367). Mourning becomes Orestes as much as it does Electra.

The old man, weeping openly (501–2), is more interested in Agamemnon's tomb than in the strangers at first: until he lets us

[29] Although those joyous expressions are to be stifled and nearly ruin the plan, for some readers they are almost the only element that humanizes this pair of siblings, the one too professional at killing, the other at hating, reviling, and bullying even those stronger than she. In both the Sophoclean and Euripidean versions, a *man* is used to perform, respectively the parts of credible travelling messenger of the "death" of Orestes and bringer of news from the outside. A *woman* could have brought the message to Clytemnestra about the "birth" (as Medea's Nurse is sent to summon Jason on family matters), but a woman (nurse or midwife or older friend or even servant) could have helped perform the ritual and so would not have been a persuasive messenger that Clytemnestra's specific presence is needed now. Does this tell us anything about the presence or absence of a servant of Electra in the early scene when she says "take this jug from my head..."? In Aeschylus a woman is used: to humanize Orestes and go back to his beginnings, to be the nurse-mother his birth mother claims to be, but is not, and to bring news from the house. This female slave and wet nurse is a real person, mourning for the lost child, not her own, but born of another woman whose affections are compromised. In Euripides the old weeping *paidagogos* of Agamemnon does not even come close in that respect, though he is the catalyst for getting the plot back on track.

know that he suspects intuitively (518, 533, 538, 547) that one of the strangers is Orestes. Someone has to remember Agamemnon. It is too much, perhaps, to say that he is forgotten, but he is only an institution to the *autourgos* who recounts his history as impersonally as possible as an outsider with some knowledge from the household would do,[30] stressing only the contrast between how he fared abroad (having brought the war to a successful conclusion) and how unlucky he was at home; he is little more than a relationship to the children (almost an institution on that scene too, more of a parent, it is true, to Electra than to Orestes). The old man takes us back to the infancy of both Agamemnon and Orestes, just before the crisis. But all he says about Agamemnon himself is to repeat Electra's ἀνόνητ' ("in vain" 507, 508); still, there is feeling in that one word. The story of Orestes' childhood fall is so generic that it could be told of any toddler chasing his pet.[31] Electra was there (573–4), but the event and the scar have not left an impression on her memory. The Atreid men are not developed fully, Agamemnon hardly at all. From a few gestures described by hostile witnesses (the messenger the farmer, and Electra, at second hand, to his activities at her father's tomb and in her mother's bed) we know more about Aegisthus[32] than we do about Orestes. We are at least given a multiplicity of versions from which to create a disturbing truth of the man whose body Electra insults.

In her opening scene Electra (as tragic characters including the Electra of Sophocles frequently do) calls on the ouranic elements (54) to witness her misery.[33] Whom else has she to address until Orestes

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[30] But even the old nurturer of Agamemnon seems to have such knowledge, perhaps gathered in the same way as Medea's boys' servant learns about the doings of his "betters" by eavesdropping at their gossip.

[31] The tame deer may seem to us an unusual pet, but children playing with deer, riding them, or using them to draw their go carts are not uncommon on painted pots. See Beck (1975:281) and Klein (1932:xiiiB and xiiiD). Is this what Euripides has done with Sophocles' Electra's sophistic argument about Agamemnon "disporting himself" in the hunt? Or does Sophocles mean to turn Orestes' pet into something more serious?

[32] See de Jong (1990:14–19) on Aegisthus as a focal character for whom the audience is expected to feel pity. Thyestes, too, has more of a part in the predramatic past than Atreus.

[33] Cf. Lloyd (with reference to Alexiou) who shows how the character of Electra can be "better understood in terms of Greek conventions of lamentation" (2–3). Even Electra's grotesque tirade to the dead Aegisthus may be seen as a parody of the ritual lament (cf. Alexiou chapter 8, "Conventions, themes, and formulae," 161–84). The contributions of Alexiou (by adding this important dimension to our understanding of Greek ritual practice and belief) and Lloyd (by subtly and sensitively

comes? Here and in her later narration to the unidentified Orestes she makes herself the *tekmerion*: that she should be one of the arguments for rousing Orestes to act is a fine Euripidean touch. That she should think she is doing it at one remove, to her brother's surrogate, is Euripidean irony (bitter or playful is hard to say, but certainly theatrical). This is part of a pattern of rehearsals of the emotions.[34] The Aeschylean Orestes arrives fully determined to do the deed and though his sister joins the chorus in urging him to act in concert with her dead father, her physical distress is not what goads him on. In Sophocles her even more self-willed and more morally potent counterpart could have been, but is not in fact, a spur to Orestes. Her action (words) which is the dramatic focus of that play contributes almost nothing to the thing that *happens* in the play (the avenging of Agamemnon and planning for it).

Alone, isolated from the palace, from her family, from her father's tomb, Euripides' Electra laments.[35] The farmer had spoken of the "sleeping murder" (41–2) of Agamemnon. Electra is sending her lamentations not to the tomb or down into the earth where the still potent remains of Agamemnon lie (as the Aeschylean Electra does, first alone and then elaborately in company with Orestes with the help of the chorus so as to rouse their dead father's power to their side), but to the empty air (59).[36] The tomb is at some distance both

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applying it to this much maligned play) to the rehabilitating of the *Electra* can be summed up in Lloyd's conclusion (19), "it is no less tragic that such an act [matricide] should be the responsibility of plausible and sympathetic characters than of the warped and inadequate individuals that Electra and Orestes are often thought to be."

[34] Here, Electra thinks she is rehearsing, telling a stranger what she will one day tell her brother; Orestes feels what the real Orestes feels, but pretends he is feeling as a stranger. But the siblings are cheated because they never do have the opportunity to be to each other and feel for each other as natural brother and sister. In Sophocles, the urn scene adds a dimension to their feelings for each other that is absent in Euripides. The pain of the latter's Electra is her *chronos*; the things she tells are the same as she has said day after day. Sophocles' Electra has reached the depth of her suffering. The pain she feels is exquisite, so crushing that it even reaches the professional Orestes of that play.

[35] The word is γόους, 59, cf. *Choephoroe*, 321, 330, 449, 502; at *Cho.* 330 the γόος is just and it searches—searches for the dead? Electra's γόος here is less effective, but it does bring Orestes out of hiding and it does identify herself to him. Her prayer that he come (135) is answered, but not at once. First the chorus comes to try to distract her and then Orestes appears, but reveals himself as a stranger and then as only a friend of her brother. On her monody as "an artless and natural expression of her feelings," see Paley (1874:321).

[36] Cf. Denniston's note *ad loc.* on the soul going into the air. But we feel less certain that Electra's cries reach her father than we do of the *kommos* in the *Choephoroe*

from this country house and from the city: even the dead king is alienated from his people (none of whom tends his sepulchre) and family (who have been scattered, one to the borderland and the other beyond the pale, and unable to do anything).[37] That distance further alienates Electra from her purpose which is to mourn her father and wait for her brother who cannot know where to find her, and it highlights her displacement from her family whether living or dead.

> *The daughter of Tyndareos, all-destroying, my mother, cast me out of the house, as a favor to her husband. And she gave Aegisthus other children making Orestes and me outsiders in our own home.* (60–63)

When (1006) Electra offers herself as her mother's slave and tries to take her hand in that fatal scene, we might well remember these lines in which she gives the cause of her misery. Nothing more is said of these new children, but we are reminded of them when Orestes asks what is the occasion of Aegisthus' sacrifice to the Nymphs. They are forgotten in the destruction of the illicit *oikos* of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. They do not matter any more since they had no reason to be other than as one more wedge in the displacement of the legitimate heirs of Atreus.[38] Orestes is never to reach the house he came to claim: once he has killed his mother nothing of his is left there. Even the question of the fate (its cleansing or liberation or its curse as the chorus calls it in the *Choephoroe*?) of the house of Atreus, so important in the other Electra/Orestes plays, is not as central here because the story has been removed from the palace.[39] The action never reaches the house of Atreus. The victims go forth to meet their fates. Only Electra is at home, but she is also the most displaced of all the characters.

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reaching Agamemnon and recruiting him. The power of the dead is absent along with the emphasis on the family, both its curse and its continuation, that are so prominent in the *Oresteia*. What is strong is not the dead man but his history, his victory at Troy.

[37] One place it is related to in the play is the estate of Aegisthus by being off the same road that leads from the old man's mountain hut to Electra's liminal cabin and past the property of Aegisthus. In fact, if we can believe Electra, Aegisthus pays more attention to his enemy's memorial than anyone else does.

[38] Is there a victory for the descendants of Thyestes after all? Are they left in possession? The displaced setting makes this a fruitless line of investigation. The children of Agamemnon never go home again and it is questionable whether they had a home to go to. The cabin we see has become what is left of the house of Atreus.

[39] Cf. Said (1989) 130, on the series of unsettling "voyages sans retour" in the *Phoenissae* and *Bacchae*.

The exile of Agamemnon's children at the end means that one pollution is now gone from Argos and the house. But the relation between the pollution that entered the house of Tantalus when Thyestes seduced his brother's wife (720–1), given as historical context for Aegisthus' present position, and the grandchildren of Atreus is far from clear. That pollution is gone from the house with the death of Aegisthus. Agamemnon's guilt, too, in sacrificing Iphigenia is underplayed when Clytemnestra subordinates her strongest argument for hating her husband to a weaker one in asserting that Agamemnon's relationship with Cassandra was the last straw that drove her to kill him (1032–4). The reasoning is suspect since she was (as seems clear from the chronology of Orestes' exile) already living with Aegisthus. But another *miasma* has attached itself to Orestes who alone and only apart from his Argive family and patrimony can be cleansed at last. In any case gone too are the descendants of their branch of the family. The family is not redeemed or freed. It is not even the center of attention: each action, rather than being part of a pattern of crime and vengeance, is undertaken almost for its own sake, try though the chorus does to make connections, to see patterns. The pollutions are personal rather than patrimonial: Aegisthus' guilt comes about because he committed murder and adultery; Orestes' because he murdered his mother.

Tyrannicide stained by matricide has led to anarchy, as it does in the *Choephoroe*, but for Aeschylus that was not the political end of the story. Governments change all the time: this is not where the tragedy lies in Euripides' play. Agamemnon was a great (or at least successful) warlord, but was not appreciated when he came home. Nothing else says that the "legitimate" line of Atreus was any more distinguished than that of Thyestes. At the end Menelaus and Helen have just arrived in the port of Nauplia (1278ff.): they will bury Helen's sister; no political purpose of their visitation is mentioned. Political chaos is just part of the general moral and historical chaos in the Euripidean dramatic world, made all the more manifest when Castor warns against wrong-doing and oath-breaking (1354–5) and absolves the matricides by blaming the gods (1296–7). The cause of the Trojan war was not after all the cause of the war (1280–3). The whole scheme of crime for crime outlined by Electra is meaningless to everyone but Electra who wants the world to be orderly, who wants villains to be villains and heroes heroes, who believes in causes and effects and who sees life like narrative art as having a beginning, middle, and

end. All this is part of the alienation theme on a more abstract impersonal level: events and causes have little relation to one another.

Electra's part in the prologue arouses pity, not, I think, as some critics have it, distaste: her cry for justice to the empty air, for she has no one else; her hard word (πανώλης, 60) for her mother who cast her out to please Aegisthus; the new children who come between mother and the older children and replace Electra and Orestes; her separation from the palace and her past: all these are tragic.[40] Her isolation from friend and enemy alike is tragic. Little is said about that other great house at first, but it is always there in her and our minds as the site of the earlier murders, as the place where this drama should be taking place (and in fact Orestes does expect it to be staged there[41]—since that is where his enemies and victims are—until the old man tells him that way is impossible and they are not there anyway, being at or on the way to another particularized space in the invisible offstage elsewhere). The scenic dislocation becomes a kind of bilocation at the end, not of the characters, but of the *skene* itself as the poor man's cottage becomes one with the house of the Tantalids (cf. 1175–6). The fact that the *Agamemnon* is the first extant play with behind the scenes action,[42] with a house in which things happen, also adds to our feeling that we are looking at the front door of the wrong interior offstage elsewhere.[43] The coming of

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[40] Cf. Neuberg (1990):69 on the *Antigone*. Electra, being expelled from her blood family and denied a real marriage family is, like Antigone, dead among the living. Fatherless, virgin and bride, she really has no social setting until Orestes comes. She expresses this placelessness very well (310–12).

[41] And it might be said that that is where Aegisthus expects it, too. Aegisthus is less wary in the garden of the Nymphs because his expectations have been deceived like everyone's else. He would expect to have to face Orestes in the palace, not just because all the other Aegisthuses are killed there, but because that is where he committed his crimes against Orestes, and that is where he would expect Orestes to come looking for him. He does not associate his estate nor the spot where he holds sacrifice with vengeance. His own evil treatment of his second cousin Electra has brought Orestes to and kept him at the border. The less than regal honor paid to Agamemnon's mortal remains and the removal of his memorial far from the palace puts the old man in the way of sighting Aegisthus. He is cordial to the wanderers and pious toward strangers, but it is not his present activity for which he is murdered nor strangers who do it. There are actions in the past that cannot be escaped, that make one who one is. Electra and Orestes become who they are in the play. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are already their perfect, mythical selves. Whatever they do cannot change that. They live in a different time (or tense) than their children/step-children.

[42] Cf. Matthiesen, 1963:145, 146–7.

[43] As Williamson (in Powell, 1990:18) writes of the *Medea*, "the off-stage space has been displaced." Even more so, I think, in the *Electra*.

Clytemnestra to this house (in a carriage, with spoils of the Trojan War) makes the parallel between her murder and that of Agamemnon (in Aeschylus' play) more visually striking and at the same time emphasizes the disturbing double displacement of the story, in that she is not only away from home but on a detour from her actual destination. It is her daughter (as she herself—her namesake, that is—had done in the *Agamemnon*) who controls the entrances and exits from this *skene*.[44]

The disorientation is there from the beginning with the farmer's delay[45] in telling who he is and where we are. We might (like Cassandra in the *Agamemnon*, 1087) ask, when the *autourgos* makes his entrance, what house this is. It will turn out to be another house reeking with murder but for now even though it is innocent of bloodshed, it is not what it seems to be[46] because of the distortion created by the *gamos agamos* of Electra and the laboring man. Any house will do for a treacherous murder, whether it is isolated by status or by geography. All it needs is walls and a roof to hide the deed and a door to expose it.

In fact it is Orestes who gives the clearest geographical details. If the *Choephoroe* is the only one of the surviving Electra/Orestes plays to antedate this one, then the palace before and near and in which the *Choephoroe* takes place is the setting we must picture as that other

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[44] With one egregious exception, when her husband invites the guests inside and Electra can do nothing to stop him, but she succeeds where it is necessary, in sending away her husband (who has no part in this plot) and in summoning the old minder and her mother. Aeschylus' Clytemnestra has one failure at the door too, when she tries to entice Cassandra inside before it is time.

[45] See Manton (1982) 5, "The longest delayed identification occurs in the opening scene of Euripides' *Electra*. Euripides has made the startling innovation of providing Electra, traditionally and by popular etymology the 'unwedded one', with a husband." But the character, as Manton notes, keeps the audience in the dark for 33 lines.

[46] It is not the simple *kleros* of a citizen, who though poor is continuing his family traditions, producing heirs to work the land his ancestors worked and to tend their (and ultimately his own) graves. We are introduced to the farmer and his wife as we might be in a comedy. Then the well-to-do young man makes his appearance. This is what we see. If we did not hear the words, this is how we might interpret what we see. But these are not anonymous citizens of town and country for whom the endless repetition is broken by festivals, themselves repetitive but infrequent, or momentous public or cosmic events (the appearance of the golden lamb, the usurpation and overthrow of the usurper, the incredible and improbable change in the sun's course, the launching of the fleet, the return of the fleet and dedication of the spoils, the murder of the king, the murder of his successor, the murder of the queen) which are historical and therefore not repeated.

offstage exterior and interior to which we always refer, but where in the *Electra* (perhaps surprisingly) nothing happens after all; but just possibly we can have both the *Choephoroe* and the *Electra* of Sophocles in mind. Sophocles' Electra wishes she could be anywhere else. If she is earlier than Euripides' there is a somewhere else she has not imagined. But if she is a comment on Euripides' Electra (as, it seems, many critics currently believe)[47] she shows that it is worse to live with the murderers than to be exiled to a country village near the border. For she welcomes (with a touch of her customary bravado) even the prospect of being immured in a lightless dungeon. But could it be worse yet to live far from her father's tomb and without the hope of seeing her brother from whom she has received no messages and who does not know where to find her? Could it not be worse to have neither friends not enemies, no one to reflect her, to be socially and societally placeless?

This embittered Euripidean virago (ridiculed by critics as fine as E. T. England) is actually rather free in her affections, almost pathetically so. She calls the rustic working man, the stranger to whom the hated Aegisthus has given her in marriage, "a friend equal to the gods."[48] For she is not so self-absorbed as to fail to appreciate what he has done for her. Four times she addresses people as φίλτατε the first with an irony characteristic of her tragedy in addressing her own long-awaited brother (229), still unknown to her, but believed to be a messenger from her brother to whom she then transfers the word of affection she cannot give her brother; next to her husband to persuade him not to be upset by her talking to the strangers (345); then to the messenger (767) whom she had at first failed to recognize, after assuming the worst and even suspecting the truth of his message;[49] and finally embracing her brother for one last time (1322). Until the last instance, these are all strangers, not really her

[47] But for a recent argument for the priority of Sophocles, see Cropp (1988) xlviii–l and his bibliography in note 86.

[48] "I consider you a friend equal to (the) gods!" (67), she says to her husband. Electra's enthusiasms are always too strong, but here she reverses the familiar folk tale. A mortal, a poor man, must always watch out for divine visitors. If he treats them well then he is rewarded, as in fact this poor man who has been faithful to the trust given into his hands is to be rewarded with a burden of wealth (is it too churlish to say he never asked for it?). But here Electra, the "heroic" visitor, calls her "host" a god's equal. In her woes, he is the proverbial healer (67–70).

[49] See Gellie (1981) 3–4 on the reading and misreading of signs and especially his observation that of twenty-six messengers and heralds in Greek tragedy, this is the only one who is not trusted at sight.

φίλοι, but all she has: her misidentification is one more indication of her loss of a place in her society. In her victory ceremony (made pitiful because of the scantiness of her supplies), she crowns the silent Pylades (886–8) the only equal sharer with Orestes, a genuine φίλος and ξένος (83).

Her gratitude to the farmer makes her willing to lighten his load as much as possible (71–2) by accepting the traditional gender-based division of labor: he has his back-breaking work outside so that, she admits, she wants him to find things in good order when he comes home (73–76).[50] It could be claimed that in the natural order of things the action of fetching water comes first. Water is needed in the household. Electra uses this activity (as she would any other associated with her new situation)[51] as a means of showing the *hubris* of Aegisthus (58). Throughout the drama the mythical/royal aspect overwhelms and finally, with the recognition of Orestes, obliterates the ordinary and is made by Electra (in her distorted[52] vision) to come first. The traditional story overwhelms the humanity of the participants, as begins to be suggested in the depiction of Electra's double motivation in the ordinary task of fetching water (in subordinating her daily needs to the rhetoric of complaint).

The gender aspect of the murders, the one (of the man), outside the house, carried out only by the men and in the presence of men; the other (of the woman), inside the house, planned and guided by a woman, confirms in a grotesque way the traditional division of labor. As has often been pointed out there is a similarity between the murderers and their victims (Agamemnon like Clytemnestra was killed

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[50] These words prefigure the murder plot: εἰσίοντι δ' ἐργάτῃ (75); Orestes, later in the play, will become the worker going inside. In *Agamemnon* Clytemnestra calls her murder of Agamemnon the deed of a righteous worker—literally she calls her right hand a righteous worker. Likewise, ἡδὺ τἄνδον εὑρίσκειν καλῶς (76): Electra prepares things well within for the murder and brings husband and wife together for a final reunion in *her* house.

[51] As her Sophoclean counterpart does, without the excuse of being dislocated from her home and family.

[52] Distorted from the point of view of farm life, but Electra is true to her heroic essence in transforming the ordinary into the mythic. See Arnott (1981) and Vermeule (1959:3), "double vision is true of the whole play, as Electra's image of the truth, and the truth itself, stubbornly refuse to match." Or is it that two kinds of truth, a timeless rural cycle of seasons, where no incident is unique, and dramatic, historical, human time in which unique events happen, in which things begin and end, are being layered the one over the other? The chorus tries, not sure whether to believe or not, to put the two kinds of time together in a cataclysmic reversal of nature (on the chorus' belief see Stinton, 1976:79–81).

inside by the hand of a man and the deceit of a woman, 9–10).

This short early scene between Electra and her "husband" gives the *chronos*, what their "marriage" and her life have been like over time. Their life together is not all bad. The princess' life has become that of an ordinary housewife, but she carries the weight of her past and cannot be assimilated into life as it is lived by other people. One incident earlier in her life ruined it all, stealing her past and future, and she expects or hopes with some bitterness at Orestes' absence (less, however, than her Sophoclean counterpart)[53] for another single (historical) incident to set it right. Electra laments all day and all night. Her lamentation is also women's traditional work. She is appreciative of the farmer: this is especially evident when she explains his virtuous behavior to the still unidentified Orestes. Another side of their relationship comes out in their second scene together in his response to her scolding. The critics who are at all sympathetic to the protagonist talk about what Electra has been denied, how her expectations have been thwarted, and rightly so; but they tend to overlook the anonymous farmer. This is no doubt because few of the critics (at least Electra's supporters) are of an egalitarian turn of mind. The farmer's disappointments are just as real, though perhaps he, being a nameless character and a character from contemporary[54] "real" life, is less real than she. When he tells her (421–3) to get things ready inside and says that a good wife if she wants to can always eke out a meal, we see what he has lost, an ordinary happy or at least appropriate life. He deserves a good and thrifty woman as helpmate and equal. He deserves heirs to carry on his family, to tend him in his old age, to give him a personal history—for the *death* of an obscure man is his only history—by duly honoring him and his simple

[53] The sad resignation shows most at line 245. She shows pity for her brother's suffering and homelessness in her prayer for his return as a redeemer (130–139). Although she responds with surprise at the ineptness of the disguised Orestes' question, "What has Orestes to do about this, should he come to Argos?" (274–5), she does sympathetically repeat his words (236, 352) that a man in exile is powerless when her "husband" asks her if the real Orestes keeps in mind the woes of Electra and her father. The most telling condemnation of the absence of Orestes is put into the mouth of the besotted Aegisthus pictured by Electra leaping on her father's tomb and asking sarcastically where is Orestes? Bitterness is more characteristic of Sophocles' Electra: at 319 and 321 she says "yes, he claims he will come but does not do it" and "I did not hesitate when I saved him!"

[54] Contemporary real life of any period in rural Greece from the post-Mycenaean setting of the play to the date of its historical fifth century performance almost to the present day. This is a tragic character who really is a "type." He is almost a class.

grave when he is dead, and to till the farm his ancestors worked. Electra's peremptory words about their being of small (404–5) means have hurt his feelings: his house is not so poor that he cannot feed two guests for a single day (424–5).

At this point, the hospitality plot is still in effect because Orestes is still unrecognized. This, too, is the farmer's contribution to the plot, for if the strangers had been sent away to find hospitality elsewhere (as Electra superficially wants) the plot would have been foiled (as it would in *Alcestis*, had Admetus taken others' advice about the propriety of receiving guests). The promised meal is never eaten nor even prepared, a pathetic detail of the multiple tragedy in which the real and homely concerns of the opening scenes before the recognition are obliterated in the grander picture of myth and murder: blood, not soot, stains Clytemnestra's beautiful dress. Blood, not balm or water, drenches her daughter's parched and dusty skin.

Besides the many everyday articles of food and clothing and the many references to matters of family life, the play is full of topographical reference[55] and that is one of the differences between this and the other vengeance plays. The offstage elsewheres (equally interior and exterior) are several and scattered: the smoky cottage, scene of the inchoate entertainment of the guests and of the murder of Clytemnestra, where Electra lives and works as a housewife. This is a poor village dwelling or possibly even an isolated country house, but not so isolated that there are no neighbors. Then there is the vast outside, the farm (near, but not necessarily contiguous to the house), the tomb of Agamemnon, the mountain hut of the old man, the well-watered garden where Aegisthus sacrifices to the nymphs and its building.[56] And there is, of course, more remote and more vague, the palace of the Tantalids and the city of Argos. The fact that we are at the border is surely significant. The exterior we see is defined by the Argolid on the one hand and foreign territory on the other. If Orestes is to step out of Argive territory it means the failure (or further delay) of his mission. He is perhaps the only Orestes who

[55] There is little detail except of the scene of Aegisthus' sacrifice and murder. In fact this is one point of the bringing home to a generic house (rather than the specific palace of Agamemnon) of the matricide. See Bernand (1985):245–9 who finds that the idealization of the country gives the *Electra* a very particular character as a drama of the *chora* rather than of the *polis*; and in general, Said (1989) on Euripides' total exploitation of the material realities of the Greek theatre.

[56] Cf. Osborne (1985) on buildings on rural properties used for sacrificial sites, 122–3.

is ready for failure and the only one who does apparently fail, since he will, upon completing his task, leave the Argolid forever, and never reach the city and palace.

But now (in the prologue and play) the set is in front of a simple cottage, given an *ethos* by being the home of a poor, decent, pious and sweetly sententious[57] man who is aware of his social position, who out of respect for the woman improperly given him denies himself his marital rights, but who is not denied everything. He has, for example, the gratitude and perhaps affection of Electra and the certain knowledge that he is doing the right thing, not to be treated lightly in a world as uncertain as that of the play. Prominence is given to the stage building by the fact that it is so surprising and what makes it especially surprising is the existence of this man from everyday life who opens the play by identifying the setting, the timing in the story, and finally himself.

The uncanonical first marriage of Electra is a surprise, but it is, I believe, unfair to say that this Electra is not a likely candidate for bride.[58] In addition to her affections so freely bestowed, she has a number of associations, etymologically unsound though they may be, with marriage. Her many erstwhile suitors (the most prominent men of Hellas, including Helen's own brother, her uncle, Castor) make her uncharacteristically (and for a pitifully brief space of time, line 21 only) a Helen figure.[59] Her marriage to the farmer has not been consummated, but that is so that (among other reasons) she can be married more suitably at the end of the drama. In the play she is "married" so that she can have a false pregnancy and birthing; so that she can remain in an ambiguous status and still be unwed until after the revenge; so that the setting can be changed from the palace to a smoky hovel (where, after all, justice does not shine; cf. *Ag.* 773–

[57] The farmer, for example, goes off to his work, expressing the poor man's creed that there is no living without toil, a nice sentiment, but hardly true objectively: the poor have always had to work harder for their living and gotten much less out of it than the wealthy.

[58] See Foley (1985):44 "the command of the Dioscuri that Electra marry Pylades can hardly transform this 'unmarried one' as her name specifies into a promising bride."

[59] The earlier reference to her mother as "daughter of Tyndareos" (13) helps to establish this connection. The farmer does not, though he gives a brief summary of the Trojan War (the mustering of a thousand ships, the killing of Priam, the taking of the city 2–5), does not mention Helen. What is significant to him are the things he could see: the ships about to sail, the returned king and spoils from the defeated city (5–7) and the death of a king.

4) and so that the change in status can be fully exploited. In other ways (the ways that are seen by the outside world), Electra and her farmer are both a paradigm and a parody of the lower class married couple or of the upper class woman married below her station. Electra is not so far gone that she does not know what her other uxorial duties are.[60] Her job, she says, is to make things ready inside, as best she can. This in fact she does do in the play, not as she says in the prologue (74–6) nor as her husband asks (422); for instead of a meal for her husband or for her brother and his companion, she prepares a death trap for her mother (647) whose wifely duties are clearly of another kind. Her scolding (404–5) of the *autourgos* for inviting the guests is not simple proof that she is a nagging, snobbish termagant; rather it is a delicate Euripidean touch. She is shown to feel the inadequacy of the house now that people from her past have come to it. She wants Orestes to know how she suffers and yet at the same time she suddenly shies away from having this stranger who is to report it to him see for himself how mean and meager are her circumstances. When the old man comes, he brings something of the former splendor (especially in the form of the finer wine and the garlands, 496–9), understanding and providing what Electra wanted. The strangers are obviously young men of the class (the old man recognizes them as noble in appearance, 550) who were once her suitors. She is reminded strongly of the past: the contrast is too much for her. Let her be a shrew. But that is not the whole of it. These last words to the farmer, though less calculated to win our sympathy than her earlier show of gratitude (67–76), along with her words to her brother about her husband's virtue and sensitivity (253, 257, 259, 261) show an intimacy of which her many detractors must think her incapable. Add to these associations with the married state her betrothal to Castor of which she feels the loss (the mentions of his name, 312, 1064, and the expression "unworthy of Castor," 1064,

[60] See Jones (1962) 244 , "Arriving at the cottage, Orestes calls it a hovel fit only for a labourer to live in. And so it is; but it is also Electra's home, and she acknowledges her duty to keep it decent for her husband; it is only right, she tells him, that he should have somewhere comfortable to return to after working in the fields all day: his right and her duty are not affected by the husband's sexual delicacy; the virgin-wife who is a king's daughter reckons herself inescapably the cottager's mistress." In a note (244:3) Jones allows as a "second motive" for Electra to show the *hubris* of Aegisthus. Electra, in fact, has given this as a first motive, an important distinction, I think. Electra is the housewife in the story, Clytemnestra the concubine.

may show something more personal and affectionate than her unhappiness over loss of status).

Her coming marriage to Pylades, predicted by Castor (1249, 1284–5) at the end, then, is not so out of place. It is she who asks (1199–1200) who will marry her now. And there is, finally, no denying that she shows interest in (some have called it an obsession with) her mother's marriage to Aegisthus and has given some thought to their sordid (in her mind) sex life. In vilifying Aegisthus' decorative (and to her, therefore, effeminate) qualities she describes what sort of husband she would like to have (948–9), something she could hardly have considered as long as Aegisthus was alive and the farmer a real presence in her life. Now that her tormentor is dead she can think again of her own life and her future.

Sadly no one really lives up to her vision and she must invent a self and the other characters who will play the roles suitable to her tragedy.[61] Exiled from the palace, she retains a vivid if lopsided picture of what goes on there.[62] The disguised Orestes (generalizing and making excuses for his feelings) asks for a full account of her sufferings that he can recount to Orestes. The chorus asks for news. What *news* can the exiled Electra have? Only her memory of the murder and speculation about the continuing life of her mother and Aegisthus in the palace. Time there has stopped for her and she lives now in the timeless[63] cycle of country life and of unrequited mourning, rehearsing the same activities, the same sounds of sorrow, the same memories of treachery in the household. She is as isolated from the city as the young women of the chorus are. But she is the princess. She is the one with a story. Time starts for her again when the guests are invited inside and she sends for the only person who could recognize Orestes. These actions and this unnamed character[64] who

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[61] See W. G. Arnott (1981) especially 181–5.

[62] In the farmer's speech Electra is firmly and repeatedly situated in the house (Agamemnon left the two children in the house, ἐν δόμοισιν 14; Electra remained in the house of her father, ἐν δόμοις 19; Aegisthus kept her in the house, ἐν δόμοις 23).

[63] Women's tasks as des Bouvrie (1990) points out (55) confined them temporally in never-ending repetitions. But in the country (and generally for the poor) such temporally based distinctions hardly apply. The physical confinement to the house and its environs is there for both genders. For a man like the farmer to find himself in a tragedy cuts through not only "the crust of type-distinctions founded on status" (Jones, 1962:243) but of gender as well.

[64] The old servant is a type or rather a function. His role is not to have a personality, but to be a catalyst in the plot. Euripides reminds us of this function by having the old man use the tokens of recognition that were well known and by

served three generations of the house bring her back into living contact with the legend of her family.

For Electra the associations with wedlock have become distorted by the manner of the breakup of her parents' marriage as well as both the period of her father's absence (during which she suspected her mother of infidelity) and the aftermath of his death, but she is still clearly interested in marriage and motherhood. The false story of her child is born of bitterness and longing for the richer and fuller normal life of which she has been deprived and to which she thinks she can be transported once the murderers are killed. She does get, at the end, a promise of such a life; but removed from the scene of her legend, it will be an ordinary life without myth to blight or glamorize it. The recognition of Orestes and the plot to kill Aegisthus allow her to think of herself as a mother. In the presence of her mother's son, she can project for herself this evidence of a more normal female existence and yet use it not for nurture but for death.

Euripides, by making her the virgin bride of the *autourgos* has given a new etymological interpretation to her name and underscored it with the false birth. He has, furthermore, reversed the common story pattern of the "virgin" (like Danae or Creousa or countless anonymous heroines of comedy or women in real life) giving birth and trying to conceal the child or expose him,[65] by declaring the existence of a nonexistent child.[66] The message about the birth of a non-existent boy also reverses the usual message in Orestes/Electra plays which is

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letting Electra mock these. The scene is functional and for Electra ethical; but the aged retainer's part emphasizes itself through the reference to Aeschylus.

[65] Or her. In myth they are usually boys.

[66] See Kubo's brilliant and much admired piece (1966). Clytemnestra, however, does not seem to fear the child, perhaps because she is so sure that the plan has worked and because she is genuinely shocked by her daughter's condition. The child to be feared is, of course, Orestes, but he too is forgotten by both Aegisthus and Clytemnestra at the crucial moments. It is almost as if Electra herself is the author of the interwoven story pattern of the feared child, which through her machinations comes to its feared and expected end. At the crucial point in her story she takes over the plot, reworking the tradition(s). This is one reason I believe the *Electra* of Euripides to be a comment on the Sophoclean version rather than the other way around. In Sophocles Electra fantasizes a new, active role for herself, a role in the male heroic world as avenger of her father; but she is doomed to fail because of the tradition. Euripides' Electra fantasizes a role for herself as an ordinary woman, wife and mother in order to participate in the heroic world. She, too, fails at the first role, but she succeeds as a collaborator in the "heroic" deed. The revenge is rendered squalid, not by the participation of a woman, but by the setting, the motives, the character of the victims.

that the returned Orestes is dead and will not return.[67] In this play there really is no significant message about Orestes. "He's alive." "He moves around a lot." "He is short of money." What he has really come for is not to bring news, but to get it.

Electra's tragedy (on the pathetic level) is that for so long she has had no one on whom to bestow the strong affections she obviously feels. On the societal level, it is that she is cut off from her *philoi* and not permitted to form a new alliance by marriage. By remaining virgin, she remains an unknown member of her natal *oikos* and yet is banished from it: it is important that Aegisthus, the false *kurios* (who wanted to destroy, not preserve the family of Agamemnon) remain unaware of her status (270) for she does not legally belong to the *autourgos* who in effect is acting as her protector until the arrival of Orestes her true and only living *kurios*. But for the present she has no place and no way to claim one. To have the action take place in the palace or any of the characters to reach it would put too much emphasis on a kind of topographical continuity that the play rejects.

Electra's honesty (which has even been taken for lack of candor) is also apparent in her prologue speeches. There is more than one reason she works on the farm.[68] Motivation is rarely simple.[69] We and Orestes need Electra's display (through her own humiliation and shabbiness) of what she has suffered and we also need her association with the house that is represented by the *skene*, paradoxically both to show her displacement and to suggest her proper role as wife, and to provide continuity.[70] We can accept as real all her motives

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[67] Cf. *Helen* (1056) and Bond (1977) who reminds us that Menelaus objects that the story of the sham death is old hat (12). Electra turns tradition on its head with a sham birth.

[68] Motivation for simple things like getting water may be simple in real life, but it is rarely so in tragedy, where it is explained at its various levels. To the farmer, Electra's truth is that she is helping him and this is a truth he accepts and understands. To the audience and the powers that be, the truth is more complicated because Electra belongs not to a simple farmer, but to the legendary world of Argive dynastic history and Panhellenic myth. To Electra no activity is free of the poison of Aegisthus and her mother and the tragedy of her alienation from her family without the compensation of being part of a new marital family. At the end, when she does become part of Pylades' family, the obtuseness of Castor in not understanding the tragedy of her loss of her natal home only underscores the tragic separation in every woman's life that is exaggerated in Electra's and extends to her brother's life as well.

[69] Cf. Antigone's surfeit of motives (or not; to Neuberg [1990:esp. 67–71] there is no inconsistency).

[70] See Jones (1962):246.

expressed and implied for wanting her mother and Aegisthus dead: to avenge her father (also called φίλτατον 153) whom she loved (even her mother acknowledges this); to get her own back (everything in the play contrasts her present and past);[71] because she is jealous of the relationship between her mother and Aegisthus; and because she hates them. She has motives enough. In the *Choephoroe* (299–305), Orestes lists as his motives for return and vengeance, Apollo's oracles, his great grief for his father (or his father's great suffering), want of resources and the fact that those who took Troy are now ruled by "a pair of women" (this last, a reference to the ambiguous sexuality of his mother and her paramour; 303–5): all natural reasons but bland compared to Apollo's horror story of the haunting by the Furies should he leave his father's death unavenged. Is Euripides' Electra's list so very different? Possibly the want of money pinches her more and she does give more space to her physical condition and, because she has less stake in it, she gives less space to the political motive. On the other hand, in the absence of the palace and the tomb, her condition is the only *tekmerion* she has to use against Aegisthus and her mother. That she loved her father we learn from Clytemnestra's words (1102–4) and Electra's own words (157ff.) and way of living. Troy is also mentioned often enough as a point of contrast between Agamemnon and his rival or as a reproach to his murderers that they demeaned such a man (186–9, 317, 336, 681, 881, 917–18 and the "Achilles ode"). Apollo's oracles she does not have (1302–4); they are in fact, though said to be strong ("rooted in the ground," 399), most vague[72] in this play and at the end they are seen to be of little

[71] The motive of materialism is never absent from the Orestes legend and in fact it may be one of the elements that makes Greek myth and tragedy in general so human and universal. We see it in Jason, Oedipus, Heracles. Only a poor man (like Electra's laborer) can renounce it. On Electra's materialism in this play, see Thury (1985):8–13.

[72] Why, for example, does he say not a word about them in his "secret" speech to Pylades? He does say that he has come from "the mysteries" (87). The oracular response and the part of Apollo is treated with typical Euripidean irony. He is first mentioned when Electra cries to him (221), probably supplicating at his altar that she should not die at the hands of the man who has come to rescue her. The first mention of the oracles of Loxias comes as Orestes enters the house. Ironically he predicts his own advent (399–400). Before the murder of Clytemnestra Orestes' anguished cry of doubt suggests Apollo's ἀμαθία (971) to which his sister replies (most depressingly if we take her words seriously), "If Apollo is foolish who are wise?" Orestes' next line gives the clearest statement of what the oracles said, "to kill my mother" (973): that is all. One hardly needs Apollo to know what must be done about the usurper Aegisthus. And he does not come into the discussion. The

succor in the human world in which they are both a cause of evil and a result of it; they carry on the evil and do not cure it.

Electra's words to the farmer (67–70) are not just an obligatory thanks. She is sincerely and expansively grateful in these (four) lines that sum up their relationship. She recognizes clearly enough not only how lucky she was to have been given to this honorable man rather than to some lout without his finer feelings but also how hard his life is: this she has learned from sharing it, as his words suggest when he brings up her former life in the palace as a reason she should not help out now (65). But that is precisely the reason that she must help: her knowledge of two different ways of life and her inference that Orestes too is as poor and displaced as she is. The contrast both helps her case before the powers she calls upon (and before the audience) and serves as a spur to Orestes.

This genuine gratitude is a shared characteristic of brother and sister. Orestes' first words are to Pylades. Both siblings are grateful for the loyalty and compassionate respect shown them in adversity by these two companions. It is surely significant that neither Electra nor Orestes calls on the gods much in the early part of the play; when Electra (in her monody) cries ὦ Ζεῦ Ζεῦ (137) it is little more than an expletive, for her prayer is really addressed to her present/absent brother. In other things too, we may note a likemindedness between the two: both put their sufferings at the hands of Aegisthus first, both speak of their mother in similar emotionally loaded terms (πανώλης 60; πανώλεθρος 86). And they care for each other, but make mistakes about each other. Together they feel remorse and accept blame after the murders.

Electra's work is inside (74–6, τἀν δόμοις, τἄνδον), although in fact, by dramatic necessity and because this is the *kairos* and her play, she spends most of the time of the play out of doors. She does make five (four of them into the house) exits: when she goes off to fill the jug with water, when she goes inside just before the departure of her husband to prepare things for the guests, during the murder of

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planning is done by an old slave. After the murder Orestes' heartrending cry to Phoebus (1190) stresses oxymoronically both the clarity and lack of it (1191) from the oracle. But that Orestes did not misinterpret is confirmed by Castor who twice attributes responsibility to Apollo (1266, 1296) and twice speaks of the unwise oracles (1245, 1302). To which Electra rightly asks "what Apollo, what oracles made me the murderer of my mother?" (1303–4). Apollo's part is less ambiguous than it is in the *Oresteia*. It is almost all ironic and negative.

Aegisthus when she goes inside to prepare things for the murder of her mother, after the messenger's speech when she goes to get victory ornaments for her brother and his friend, and when she enters the house behind her mother, all in their way gender related in fact or by pretense.[73] The farmer's scolding her for making her first entrance and for standing outside in the company of men is perhaps Euripides' amusing way of mocking stage conventions (or rather necessities) or social conventions. Certainly the fact that she is outside her country cottage is not a transgression of social convention:[74] fetching water is a traditional occupation of women. As are mourning for a deceased relative and sharing news with other women.[75] What is odd is that the king's daughter must fetch her own water and this is the farmer's point. His scolding of her for talking to the strange men of course indicates his conventionalism and protectiveness, but ironically since one of the strangers is her closest kinsman and natural protector.

Shared experience tells the audience about the inside of this house, an ordinary poor man's dwelling, squeezed by poverty and dramatic exigency to the borderland. Electra's entrance (exit from the house) with the jug lets us have these insights into her character and into

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[73] Michelini in a brilliant reading of the play (1987:182–230) writes that *Electra* makes "the most garish contrast between the foreground of myth imagined as reality and the background of myth as unreal and undramatizable fantasy" (184). This is a good point. But not everything that is undramatized (that takes place behind the stage building) is full of meaning. Electra's first return to the house leaves her in there with Orestes, but nothing happens. The *skênê* is still all potential until Orestes is recognized. Only then does the façade grow "into very relevant prominence . . ." (Jones, 246). What is dramatized and dramatizable is Electra's making of the myth by using the resources available to her (the arrival of her brother, a marriage that is no marriage, a dirty and dark cabin, her mother's ordinariness). The question is, which is the fantasy and which the reality? Is the real Electra the cottager's wife or the king's daughter? Her own words and actions show that the role of poor man's wife is as much a fantasy for her as the lost palace life. When the play opens she is no one and she feels this displacement most strongly (cf. 175ff.).

[74] See Easterling's eye-opening article (1987) on women in the tragic space. I am particularly grateful for her point that women's presence in the space defines what that space is (23).

[75] This sharing of news might more realistically take place at the fountain house. But dramatic necessity requires the presence of the chorus in the orchestra and not in some fictitious offstage space. By a sleight of hand Euripides brings on the chorus just as Electra is returning with her filled *hydria*. Time must be telescoped; but the suggestion (without resorting to an awkward change of scene) is made that this is the sort of feminine sharing that goes on when women go to fetch water or to wash their clothes as in the parodos of *Hippolytus* and book 6 of the *Odyssey*.

the interior of the offstage space. Her brief, generic remarks about the house begin to create the space inside in its *chronos* as anyone's house and the site of everyday activities like food preparation and consumption and weaving of utilitarian cloth, as we learn later, 307.[76] The farmer's reference to an earlier time when he told her not to work on his account shows that these words have been said before (66) and would be said again if this were not the *kairos*. For the house is to be transformed and then abandoned (and with it everyone's estates and Mycenaean ancestors, those of the *autourgos* whose family goes back uncounted generations and that of the relative latecomer Orestes, son of Agamemnon, son of Atreus).

The distance from the palace and the absence of the tomb together with the separation of the siblings (before and after the crucial deed) mean that in their familial relations not much is profoundly changed: even more than their mother, they gain nothing of value from the murder. And because of their heightened sensitivity they lose more both morally and emotionally than she. They are to remain exiled and separated. Electra acquires a higher class husband (and gets to keep the farmer as some sort of retainer or family friend), but is this compensation enough for the weight of her guilt, the loss of her blood family, the annihilation and abandonment of the house of Atreus and the diaspora of the children of Agamemnon? They had been scattered and separated before the play opened; they had been irremediably alienated from their mother. Now they have lost even the hope of return. What they gain is a place in a disreputable but powerful myth where justice is said to be done, and where gods

[76] One is tempted to add (with late twentieth century bias), perhaps not enough washing: cf. 305, 184. This "sordid domestic detail" that Electra does her own housework (confirmed when she tells her mother that she delivered herself) might add to the weight of the singular nouns (107, 109, 110) used by Orestes when he first sees Electra to lead us to the conclusion that Electra has no servant and addresses herself throughout her monody. Orestes thinks she is a slave woman; if there are two, why would he make a distinction between them, by speaking only of her? There is no evidence of a woman who is Electra's confidante or intimate servant. Her isolation and poverty are better served if there are no other women in her life than those we know are there (the chorus and in the one scene, Clytemnestra). It is her hard-working husband and not a servant whom she commands to go fetch the old man. See Keene (1891): 432–3 on the scant scholia to this play, one of which (*ad* 140) reads, "Electra says this to herself, taking it [the water jug] off [her head]." Denniston (1939):64, *ad* 112–13, writes "In what language can one say to oneself 'Put this pot from *my* head'?" In Greek, I think, and in English. Throughout the monody she uses both second and first person forms of herself.

instigate senseless and morally repugnant actions. And justice can be faulty (1151; cf. Sophocles, *Electra* 1042).[77]

The arrival of Orestes is the *kairos* everyone has been waiting for with hope or fear, but there is a long interval—during which the *chronos* is presented—between his appearance early in the play and the expected beginning of the revenge plot. Orestes hides, not in fear, but to find out. He continues to hide even after he knows all the facts and feelings he can learn without being himself. On the other hand, there is nothing he can learn of a practical nature (where Aegisthus is, for example) until the old man arrives and tells him in front of others who he is himself. For he has no self, no past until the old man gives him one. Is it the others who give validity to his identity?

The domestic scene that ends with the farmer going off to his fields and Electra off to fetch water, spotlights Orestes (who now shows himself) as an outsider. This is his traditional role; in Sophocles he even has to have the sights pointed out to him; here there are no sights,[78] only long stretches of subsistence farmland. But in the earlier play (*Choephoroe*) it is he who in the opening lines addresses his native place and before our very eyes offers his locks to Inachus and his father at the tomb that is visible and indeed central in the first half of the play. Here he narrates his visit to the tomb (part perhaps of his new or expanded role as his own messenger). And the farmer has been the one to address Inachos and the plain of Argos, as natural phenomena rather than poignant reminders of exile and homecoming. The farmer is an almost invisible fixture in this setting, but an intruder in the story. Displacement remains prominent in this final speech of the prologue: Orestes has arrived at the τέρμονας of Argos (96).[79] He is the one to let us know more precisely where we are *and* that the tomb is outside the city, far from the palace. He needs to learn τά γ' εἴσω τείχεων (101) and we again focus our attention on

[77] See Bremer (1991):337.

[78] Later there will be directions to specific places and the temple of Hera is referred to in this play as in Sophocles' *Electra* but by the chorus to Electra rather than by the old man who is familiarizing Orestes with his home, because his home is not here.

[79] From the displacement at the beginning (the patent absence of homecoming) we might predict the end. How would the characters be transported to a happy homecoming in Argos from this bleak and liminal space? There is not even a long way around as there is for Aeschylus' Orestes. All that is left for these children of Agamemnon is further separation.

the place and on the distant palace that is so dramatically *not* there, *not* the scene of the dramatic or narrative action. He also gives the precise timing: the break of day. It was still night when Electra and the farmer came out.

Electra comes back carrying the pot, now full, on her head. This, perhaps, affects the pace of her return. In the refrain she hurries herself along. The refrain (112–14, 127–9) gives us the impression that the lament is the same day after day[80] and perhaps with it the chore of carrying the water jug, a realistic sameness of everyday life before the *kairos* that will change everything into myth and will bring to an end this repetition of daily events. Not only that, but she tells us that she spends her days and nights singing the same lament. In typically Greek fashion, she treats her own suffering first. All she need do is name her parents (115, 116) to explain why she is ἀθλία (118, cf. Denniston *ad loc.*): she is unhappy because of who she is in the genealogical sense, one kind of identification, but only one of several offered in the play. She situates the three sufferers: Agamemnon in Hades (122); Orestes in what house she does not know (130) but surmises that he eats at the slaves' table (205); herself left after her father's tragedy in the palace halls (132) where, perhaps, she still (off and on) fantasizes she lives until she is forced to acknowledge the "cottager's" house as her own (251). Her own, her brother's, and her father's sufferings are inseparable in any case: the children's humiliation a reflection of the father's; the father's miserable death the cause of the children's mourning and misery. In the monody (though when she gets to the details in her answer to Orestes' request for information the emphasis is reversed) she shows more feeling for her father than for herself (especially obvious in 150–56 and 157–66 and the repeated vocative address to her father, 122, 144, 156, 161). In the second antistrophe she envisions the action in the palace, the bath, the axe, the sword, the blows, and (probably) mutilation (see Denniston *ad* 164 and *Choephoroe* 439, Sophocles *Electra* 445): these are her memories of that fatal event in the palace which the chorus will relive during the murder of Clytemnestra: the memories that halted her life into a sameness, that took away her growth, that turned her into *the* Electra, the unbedded one. This is the lament she rehearses all night long and all day (181–3) and cries out in the morning to the elements (142 and, on the timing, Denniston *ad loc.*).

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[80] See Alexiou (1974):135.

Her refusal to participate in the festival is not just or even primarily evidence of her ill temper (or martyr complex), but of her displacement, of the ambiguous status in which she finds herself, and of the event that made her nobody (and did the same for Orestes). The same natural elements that witness her outrage and the *hubris* of Aegisthus will not see her don finery to dance with the Argive maidens. These things are not for her.[81] And yet she is (metatheatrically) interested in clothing, in her appropriate costume that is part of the witness she bears to her audience (human, elemental, and supernatural) and that Euripides bears to his.[82] Physical and ethical displacement and alienation are confirmed too by the misunderstandings of the two siblings (Electra's of the intentions of Orestes and his companions, Orestes' of the identity of his sister, for example). The facts that they *do not* recognize each other and that Electra knows she would not know him (283) and yet does not take any of the undisguised but unknown Orestes' hints and so leap to identify him as her counterpart does (but then, discouraged by the chorus, holds back) in the *Choephoroe,* and that only an outsider (the one who took Orestes away) could do so (285–7) add to the pathos of this displacement and to the insistence that they are not a special mythical brother and sister until they have made themselves into figures of legend and horror. This Orestes even claims to be the outsider he is in fact (291), making pity his excuse for acting like a member of the family and asking for more facts so that he can pity more (292–5), in one of many rehearsals for the time they will be themselves. As a stranger he can pity his sister. When he becomes known to her there is no time for affection and the time for pity is over . . . and not yet begun. These rehearsals come to nothing after all.

When asked to tell her tale Electra (300, 302) speaks, with some initial reluctance, of her own and her father's fates.[83] Electra's condition (which is also part of his suffering) would probably not be fully known to him (in fact it is not, for he is surprised by the poverty

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[81] Cf. Lloyd (1986) 2, Electra's character is "better understood in terms of Greek conventions of lamentation" and Alexiou (1974) chapter 7, esp. 135. In this refusal she also refuses to ape the Chrysothemis of Sophocles' *Electra* and be relatively better off, but compromised.

[82] See Muecke (1982) 22, "Costume . . . is the link between the poet and the character and it stands for the metamorphosis of actor into character effected by the dramatist."

[83] Cf. Alexiou (1974: 161–2) on the formula of the ritual lament and the initial hesitation and questions.

of her house and mistakes her for a slave and is much taken aback by the appearance of and introduction to her husband, whose natural nobility in a less than aristocratic physical persona makes Orestes reconsider and renounce for the nonce all his aristocratic ideals and badges). He has, of course heard that she is married (true; but he also heard that she is no longer a virgin, 98–9, which is under normal circumstances a redundancy, but not in her case, giving some point to his pleonastic wording) but it is a realistic detail that he has not heard to whom and under what conditions; Aegisthus would have kept his disgraceful action toward his kinswoman quiet and the name of the husband would have been as unknown to him as it is to us. What she has to tell is news that might bring the real Orestes home; it is not too late for her to regain her birthright and a more suitable husband.

The two houses, the one we see, the other where the usurpers live, are constantly on our minds and they form the focus of the contrasts—between rich and poor, fertile and sterile, inside and outside (both of the house and of the city/state)—that characterize this play. Even more than in *Medea*, the offstage spaces are displaced.[84] Orestes though rightful heir of an illustrious and wealthy father is an exile, wandering from place to place (234), with only enough for his daily needs (236); but this is his traditional role. The difference is that he comes to look for his *sister* because she is not in his ancestral home and he has no way of knowing where she is. Electra lives in the house of a laborer (207) at the sight of which Orestes is rightly (we must assume) shocked (251–2, 255). All the while Clytemnestra lives married to another man ἐν λέκτροις φονίοις (211) and enjoying the wealth of the house. The contrast between this rustic house and her palace is mentioned again and again. More details are given of Clytemnestra in the palace, sitting on a throne amid Phrygian finery, attended by Trojan maids, a picture that comes to life as a "moving tableau" when Clytemnestra herself is carried on stage.[85] Amid that splendor, the blood of Agamemnon is putrefied in the house (318–19; it is almost as if Electra is making a literary allusion to *Choephoroe* since she is herself far away and the vivid picture of the black blood clotted seems more a poetic or traditional than a visual memory).

What exactly do we see? As readers how can we tell? In tragedy

[84] See Williamson (1990) 18.
[85] See Halleran (1985):11, 14–15.

the house is almost always somewhat isolated and the chorus must come to it. One story is picked out, perhaps a representative story, but usually, as Aristotle notes, a story from one of a small number of families and not, therefore, every man's story. These are usually ruling families and the *skene* represents the palace. Here it represents a house that is not an urban dwelling. But it is neither Philoktetes' cave where we are told again and again that he lives in total isolation from the human community nor Agamemnon's military lodge (in the *IA*) which we are told is at one end of a long line of similar establishments. The farmer has to walk some distance as is typical of Mediterranean farming settlements. It would not do to have him in view during the parodos and kommos and the episode in which Electra and Orestes meet. The chorus (of village girls, who themselves live far from the ἄστυ, 298) comes on because they have news which Electra might not hear because she is so isolated (geographically, spiritually, socially?). Clytemnestra asks "have you no neighbor?" (1130). Isolated though this house is (on the border of the territory), it is not as remote as the dwelling of the old man who will recognize Orestes and join in the plot. The isolation of the old man once an intimate of the royal family is yet another, further displacement. In Sophocles' version his counterpart is one of Orestes' companions and what is more the one who reintroduces him to Argos. It was he who instilled in Orestes the whetted purpose he carries out with such sangfroid. In this play, Orestes is so estranged that he does not recognize anyone, including his rescuer, including his sister. From the sight of his mother he hides his eyes. His only clues to identity are locations. Perhaps someone on the outskirts of Argive land can tell him where his sister is; luckily for him his sister names herself first. Aegisthus will be recognized because he is the one sacrificing to the nymphs in the pastures off the road. His mother is the woman who enters the house where he is hiding; he cannot look at her and yet he sees more of his mother than a son should ("the limbs that gave me birth" 1209). Too late he recognizes her and acknowledges her as his mother and she him as her son.

2. *Recognition and the Pot*

Orestes sees Electra (Electra to us, a generic peasant or servile woman to him, from whom he conceals himself) with the pot on her head

and takes her for a slave.[86] But soon enough (115–120), her words reveal her to him as his own sister. She is identified through her familial relationships (as is typical of tragic figures and real people, especially women): she names her father, her mother, and her mother's father, relationships which make her ἀθλίαν (119).[87] At the end of the strophe she returns to her father's name, encircling the murderers with their victim (121, ὦ πάτερ . . . Ἀγάμεμνον, 124), suggesting what actually happens, that they are ensnared by their crimes. In the antistrophe the painful relationship that identifies her is that of brother and sister. Again her own suffering is at the center, but it is surrounded by the hardships of her brother on the one hand and on the other by a prayer for his return which would end the misery of them both (she thinks). And yet in spite of full knowledge of and growing pity for her misery he remains unidentified. This variation on the recognition theme—the sister being at first unknown—is made possible by the displacement of the setting. Usually Electra is to be associated with her father's hearth (and so, easily recognized, because she is where she belongs), something this liminal Electra has lost.

On his return from the fields, the farmer learns who the strangers are (not) and establishes for himself, reminding us that this is not the matter of real interest, that the strangers have been informed of all they need to know. The interest created in the audience, however, concerns not Orestes' knowledge but Electra's. We, of course, once the husband of Electra (the only surprise character) has identified himself,[88] know at sight the identities of all the characters. Electra is the one with a deficiency of facts and it is her ignorance that interests us: how and when will she find out that her prayers have been answered, that her brother is here, that this really is the ἀκμή (275) not just for herself since she has finally someone to tell it to, but for the myth to take its inevitable course? Her knowledge will mean

[86] That is a status she will claim for herself later when she identifies with her mother's captive women who have lost their fathers and homes; oddly her mother speaks of these women as substitutes for her lost daughter, one of many displaced relationships in this play in which mother and daughter are unable to be anything to each other.

[87] Tyndareos after all had two daughters (three according to the *Iphigenia at Aulis*), the other even more famous than Clytemnestra. His name is suggestive of the beginning of the series of events that led to the present situation, of the suit for Helen's hand and by proximity that for Electra. Aegisthus too chooses not to choose one of the suitors for his step-daughter, but far from letting her choose for herself he chooses an unsuitable man who was not among the many suitors.

[88] See Manton (1982):5.

getting the story back on course. All the elements must first be brought together. As in the other versions these elements are introduced separately, but they remain both together and alien until the old man from the past of the house of Atreus is able to not only identify Orestes but inform him of the whereabouts of Aegisthus away from home. With the change in setting there would be little efficacy in identifying Orestes without the additional information. At this point the farmer sends the young men inside to reward them for their information (hardly deserving of his generosity which is offered to them more because they are ξένοι than for anything they have *done*) with whatever is stored in his house.

The recognition is postponed again.[89] Orestes does not go in right away, nor does he take this opportunity to identify himself although he does identify himself with the feelings of Orestes and at the same time he reveals the musings of Orestes that make his hesitation more understandable to the audience. Instead of direct revelation he gives a rambling speech regretting the limitations of human knowledge, in this case, our inability to know what anyone is really like, and eliminating false canons of judgment (which are at the same time the traditional criteria of *arete*) one by one. It is almost as if he does not know how to recognize himself or know what sort of man he is or is to become. The disguised man—having no particularities—has no way of recognizing the true man; he is only his generic self, but that is no self at all in tragedy. If it were, he might as well be Pylades in disguise. For those traditional criteria (of noble birth, material wealth, military success) seem to him as he examines them in relation to real action at the crisis of his life of little comfort and of no deep significance. His noble birth (which shows in his dress and bearing) is the major cause of pain to him, the shared pain of his own and his sister's condition and the pain of knowing (which he assuages with false uncertainty) what it is his fate to do and be. The material wealth he hopes to regain by killing the usurper will be lost. The military success achieved in the killing of Aegisthus and facing down his large retinue will make him a short-lived hero in the eyes of the messenger and his sister, but will be obliterated in the ambushing of his mother, which is done in the dark where no one can see it, but all will know of it. The hero of the moment will find his heroic moment all too short.

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[89] On the several near recognitions see Solmsen (1967):42.

The only times Orestes takes the lead are when he identifies himself to the former servants of Aegisthus (850) and when he offers the body of Aegisthus to his sister to insult (893–5). These assertive actions are crucial. Orestes leaves for his adventure on an emotional crescendo (at the end of the abbreviated invocation to the dead). He returns in good spirits, successful, certain of the virtue of his success after identifying himself (850), an action he can take only after Aegisthus is dead. Soon after this he is seized by paralyzing doubts brought on by the sight of his mother (967–81). He has still not glued himself to ἄτη (cf. *Agamemnon*, 1566). Electra without the benefit of Apollo's oracle tramples on his scruples. The bringing back of the dead Aegisthus is yet another variation on the traditional ordering of events. As in the other versions, Aegisthus is away from his palace, but in the other versions he is summoned or expected. Nothing would bring him, alive, to this setting, but the *eccyclema* (1170ff.) scene demands two bodies. The fact that in Euripides neither Aegisthus nor Clytemnestra identifies the body of the other just before they are to be united in death is a confirmation of the alienation even of the adulterous couple, who never have a scene together in the revenge plays and in Euripides' play Clytemnestra is afraid to be seen with Aegisthus (643–5). Even they are unable to be anything to each other.

Orestes has shown real gratitude to the farmer and even admiration of him. His surprise at the *aidos* and generosity of the man called his brother-in-law has inspired his pretentious speech (367–400). As an exile, he is a connoisseur of other people's hearths and one thing is certain, he finds this house particularly poor.[90] If he were satisfied with Electra's condition, her speech as well as her appearance would have proved to be a failure. What he means by his candid remarks (397–8) is that for her brother's sake he wishes Electra were better off and Orestes too for her sake. Orestes (like all liars) is in something of a bind. Just before he enters the house, having spoken of himself as a third person, he says, "Perhaps he will come." He so far identifies his own with his assumed (generic and anonymous) persona that though still (pretending to be) a stranger he refers to the oracles (so prominent in the other versions) which have not been mentioned

[90] As Martin Cropp points out, these early scenes have their relevance to the outcome as becomes more and more clear. Orestes, for example, will be invited to a more prosperous dwelling. His comments on the poverty of the house continue to keep us mindful of this fact which recurs at the last entrance into this dwelling by any characters.

before[91] and which come more and more to bother him. He concludes his rambling speech about the uncertainty of knowledge with the one certainty he has: the oracles of Apollo (399–400), which indeed turn out to be true oracles of the god but bad advice. He introduces them (399) with the prediction ("maybe Orestes will come") that cannot fail to come true, since Orestes is already here. Again he is rehearsing for the time he will enter his sister's house as her brother. This time does not come. His mother arrives too soon and he is hurried into the house.

This scene and the recognition scene contain some delicious moments. Electra and the farmer are, of course, unaware of the true identity of Orestes, but the farmer is concerned with making sure that Orestes is informed of the facts. Orestes has to be told who the farmer is. And later he fails to recognize the old man who saved his life. Meanwhile, everyone else is kept in the dark about his own identity. He is the only unknown to them and to him everyone is unknown.

His own identity remains concealed while he laments (metatheatrically?) human failure to know the man behind the mask or the real person concealed under the clothing and other evidence of status. After coming fairly close to identifying himself by sympathizing strongly with Orestes' point of view and talking about the oracles of Apollo which have little relevance to anyone else, Orestes goes into his sister's house. In the other versions, getting Orestes into the stage building is crucial to the action and depends on the ruse that he is dead. Here he enters the stage building two scenes too early, for there is nothing for him to do there now. Now his sister wants to keep him out and is forced by the farmer's hasty and genuine hospitality to accept him.

What is achieved by the continued postponement of the recognition? Electra can scold the farmer for sending the strangers into the house, calling attention to the fact that he has done so and to the unworthiness of the house and at the same time send him away to get the plot moving. A plot needs some incident. Later she will herself station her brother inside the house, turning his first entrance into

[91] Orestes did mention a visit to the oracle that presumably (as in the other versions) spurred him to come to the Argolid. The oracle apparently gave him no practical advice (as it does the other Oresteses). It is left to Electra to remind him that he will not get off scot-free if he fails to avenge his father.

the house into a rehearsal for the more important entrance. And she will point out to her mother how poor the house is; but poverty is no longer its most cogent characteristic by then. The house becomes more focal when Orestes and his entourage enter it for the first time, as the place of true hospitality which will be followed by false. The old man will be brought on to identify Orestes and there will be more delay as Electra dismisses his tokens one by one, while Orestes remains concealed inside, waiting for the talk to come back to the subject of the strangers. The fact that they are the Aeschylean tokens is less an attack on Aeschylus as a playwright (or even on his standards of probability) than a means of showing the different character of this play's *ethos* and setting.[92] Possibly too it is an indication (one of many) that *knowledge* is a theme in this play, and especially the knowledge of *ethos*. The old man also brings us more information, but merely factual. Through his news he is as important to the plot as Orestes' nurse in the *Choephoroe* and perhaps more vital than Orestes' *paidagogos* in Sophocles' version (since Orestes directs the murder plot in that play and could have been his own messenger).[93]

Why does Orestes fail to identify himself once he knows he is in the presence of his sister and that the chorus is trustworthy?[94] There are a number of possible answers to this obvious question. First, of course, there is dramatic effect: recognition scenes become increasingly popular and less and less straightforward[95] (which may explain why Euripides includes a parody of Aeschylus in this recognition scene, equally, perhaps, a parody of the type-scene as of his illustrious predecessor and more than a parody, an exposé of his characters and of what is and is not to be pictured in the imaginary offstage space). Simply saying "I am Orestes" admittedly is a bit flat. Aeschylus built up his recognition through the excitement of Electra, her seeing her

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[92] See Pucci (1967:371), who concludes that the parody of the Aeschylean tokens is "really a criticism of the contemporary naive belief in the existence of self-supporting evidence, i.e. in the existence of self-evident rational steps towards truth."

[93] What is the purpose of the old man in the *Electra* of Sophocles? In part he is a distancing mechanism. It is he who gives the elaborate description of the false accident. It is he who refuses to give details of Clytemnestra's reaction to the false report. At the same time he reconnects Orestes to his homeland. "The truth," as Leo Aylen wrote (in another context, 1965:98) "is the combination of the contradictions."

[94] Having brought the good news that Orestes is alive, the identification is not as crucial as it becomes in Sophocles' play where the despair of Electra is too much even for the more efficient and workmanlike Orestes of that play.

[95] For an elaborate recognition of Orestes none can surpass that in *Iphigenia among the Taurians*.

brother in the lock of his hair and then refusal to accept him in the flesh; Sophocles through the exquisite scene with the urn, that only a poet of his genius could have kept from becoming bathetic. Euripides does it through the *mechanema* of the almost comic old man.

Then there is the tradition: beginning with Stesichorus (Page, *PMG* 217) the lock of hair has been used as a token.[96] False identities, delay, and tokens are used in the series of recognitions of Odysseus; in fact saying "I am Odysseus" early in his wanderings brings him bad luck. This Orestes, far from being "silly" (as England thinks him), is such a passive character that even telling his name may be too assertive for him. He is so filled with intellectual doubts that he is not ready to aver any more than he does, that he is an acquaintance of Orestes and shares certain concerns of Orestes. This is the only information about Orestes that we get. And as Martin Cropp suggests, part of his lack of distinctiveness as a character stems from his anonymity in the first half of the play. He never does say directly on stage "I am Orestes" as the others do,[97] but simply accepts the name and the role when it is given him. The old man turns the anonymous stranger into Orestes, first by finding the hair that Orestes in fact dedicated at the tomb, then by suggesting that perhaps Orestes has come in secret and then by looking hard at the strangers.[98] Both Electra and Orestes participate in this last step: Orestes by asking if the old man sees a resemblance between himself and someone else and Electra by admitting that he is the same age as Orestes. Before that, both had actively fought the identification.

Once Orestes is identified, everything is transformed from the ordinary to the mythic and monstrous, to the ambivalent glamorous

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[96] See Bremer (1991):325–6.

[97] Sophocles' Orestes especially has to convince his sister to believe that he is Orestes, but this is because his aged retainer as messenger of his death has been so very convincing: a false picture has to be erased and this is done by the signet ring, which gives Electra a positive mental image, of her father, to replace the false story of her brother's death; on the other hand the hair and the logical argument that no one else would have dedicated it is enough for Chrysothemis. Electra has to invent an equally logical argument to counter her sister's and to keep the truth from surfacing. In Aeschylus' version Electra forms her mental picture of Orestes as soon as she sees the hair but is dissuaded by the chorus' reasonable doubt that Orestes would have dared to come to Argos so that as Solmsen (1967:35–7) notes she can no longer trust her reasoning powers, and again must be convinced by Orestes through the more personal item of the article of clothing she wove for him.

[98] A scene of one character looking hard at another and turning an anonymous character into the loved and longed for member of the family was staged before in *Alcestis*.

violence of the world of the choral odes. The familiar domestic scenes that are so prominent in the early episodes are transferred to the victims: to the hospitable Aegisthus with his array of sacrificial utensils and the well-heeled Clytemnestra with her servants, her pretexts, and her tarnished values. Orestes must *be* Orestes and nothing can be the same again. This is the special genius of Euripides and the real reason for the deferred identification, that the play can begin with scenes taken from the domestic life of simple people: nothing like that occurs in Aeschylus and Sophocles. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, when they become more visible (Aegisthus through detailed narration of his activities and Clytemnestra in person), both move from the remote and wicked to the ordinary. The delayed recognition adds a weight to the first half of the play that reaches its climax in the identification of Orestes, which in turn becomes more theatrical because of the delay. The rest of the play, after this intellectual questioning of the nature of knowledge, is all action (or what is more dramatic to the Hellenes *words* about action) without much thought. Orestes wavers briefly, and is spurred forward by his sister. There is no recognition of a pattern or an aptness to the series of events as there is in the *Choephoroe*. This Orestes needs no reminder of the oracles from his companion; he himself remembers and questions them. Nor does his mother cooperate in her demise through her self-incriminating dreams and her reminder of them at the last minute. This Clytemnestra is completely surprised by the return of her son and goes down not calling for a weapon but begging for her life. She is a wicked woman, but above all she is banal. Even her wickedness though not trifling is trivialized by her own motivation, rationalization, repentance, and moderation: she is repulsed by the evil she has done and shrinks from further wrong-doing, as she shrinks from her daughter's dinginess. Neither seems worse than the other.

Everyday domestic routines in the first half of the play give way to a different rhythm in the second half. But even these earlier scenes are interlaced with remembrances of murders past and other crimes.

In the build-up to the recognition scene Electra had been humiliated by the farmer's invitation to the guests and displayed an awareness of their own incompatibility as a married couple and the unsuitability of the house to receive such guests. These are just guests to the farmer, but to Electra they are more than just any strangers. Even identified they would still be strangers to the farmer, who does not belong to their world though he and his world will be uprooted

by their deeds. In her instructions to the farmer Electra pathetically calls attention to the contrast between the old *tropheus* of her father, no kinsman, but a slave, who will be delighted by good news of Orestes and will contribute to the entertainment of these messengers from him and the mother who would not give anything and who would be sorry (so at least her daughter infers from her mother's past behavior) to hear that Orestes is alive. But the farmer gets in the last word, obeying her orders, but also giving her his orders, reminding her of the division of labors. His is the last word: what good is money? Rich and poor are the same once their bellies are full. His attempt at radical egalitarianism however is not borne out by what happens in the play. The grander characters have different needs from the simpler folk (the *autourgos* and the chorus). Their world, the world created by Electra and the legendary tradition that determines her, and the characters she creates to suit it overwhelm the real world. Euripides has pushed the tradition to its limit, letting Electra escape from Argos, displacing all the characters from the palace, but still what happened happened. Orestes' speech of regret may show him longing for that simplicity that is denied him because of who he is (or is to become once he is known).[99] Once Electra knows that they share the same past and heritage and knowledge of what must be done, he will have to turn that knowledge into some action. There will no longer be the possibility of not acting, of escaping beyond the border, which he would have done if recognized in another context.

The man called Electra's husband does not return; he is no longer focal. He will not participate (beyond summoning and returning as the revenge plot's third actor and being husband in name) in the murder because he is an outsider without a fixed part in the doings of the royal house of Argos. To involve him in the revenge plot would be to make of him more than he is. His role has been to provide a contrast between what is and what Electra had every reason to expect. And, perhaps, to blur the distinction between rich and poor. Or between fiction/myth and reality. He is a character from real life recognizable to (if not admired by) the audience. That he is made to be a better person (at least more sure of what is proper to him and what action he should take) than the royal, mythological personages who have names is part of the *logos-ergon* disparity. He is

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[99] The audience already knows who he is and what he will do.

also a simpler character, with simpler needs, unable to grasp the full meaning of the situation for the legendary characters, but, like the chorus, providing a welcome point of view.

Aegisthus by making Electra live in obscurity, is denying her her birthright as a princess, but more than that as a legendary figure; denying her the potency of the heiress to Agamemnon and potential mother of a mighty avenger. This sort of demythicizing of characters happens in Euripides: here it is the everyday details that contribute to the clash of tradition and truth. This is what Michelini perceptively calls the "assimilation of the comic universe" (230).[100] Aeschylus and Sophocles, however, also use characters from real life (for example, the watchman in *Agamemnon*, the Nurse in *Choephoroe*, the guard in *Antigone*, the shepherds in *Oedipus Tyrannus*). In Euripides such persons are, I think, more integral to the plot and more central to the themes. In Aeschylus and Sophocles, these characters present a point of view that needs to be expressed (as the guard in *Antigone* puts in a word for *life* without the heroics, without the ideology), but in Euripides, the farmer, for example, not only speaks the first words of the play and is remembered at the end, but also affects Orestes' views, not that he changes what happens, but he elicits an ethical response from the main characters, which minor characters rarely do.

This "inappropriate" domestic and rural scene shows how pitifully far Electra has come from the unrecoverable mythical past she longs for and from the palace life in her father's house that she misses. The contrast is made all the more painfully clear by the choral song about Achilles, unusually romantic and unearthly (violent though it is in the decorations on the armor),[101] but missing the domestic and

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[100] Michelini (1987):230. See also Aylen (1965:85–100) for a refreshing encomium on the "vulgarity" of Greek tragedy from Aeschylus to Euripides.

[101] When the chorus reaches the sword of Achilles (the only item of his armor that has its counterpart on stage, for Orestes is armed with a sword), the description of the armor has become a description of the battle itself. Peaceful, music-loving dolphins were leaping about the prows of the ships; now four-footed horses, drawing the chariots of war, are leaping on the sword *and* in the dusty field of battle. The *bloody* sword has already been used to kill. The chorus in the epode has finished with oblique allusions and now makes its specific comparison with the things being done now. But something is disturbing in this comparison. Which daughter of Tyndareos is referred to, Helen or Clytemnestra, both too often married, but neither a man-killing or fear-inspiring monster? Where are the parallels between past and present? In the bloodied sword that struck the Gorgon's neck; that cut down countless Trojans; that will slash Clytemnestra's throat. In the horse-drawn chariot that will bring Clytemnestra—like a bride, like a conquering hero with the spear-won prizes from the Trojan War—to the country dwelling of her daughter who will

social scenes depicted on his shield in Homer. Even this shield from real life is less real than Homer's great fantasy of heroic armor.

The Achilles ode is a Homeric reminiscence with significant changes.[102] Its position ushers in the returned but obscure Orestes, the hero in hiding, comparing him not very flatteringly with the most illustrious and brilliant hero of the Trojan War, but another hero destined never to see his home again. The ode takes us back to the beginning of the war, a step in Trojan War reminiscence. The farmer had told of the mustering of the troops that sailed with Agamemnon from Argos. Between lines 3 and 4 the whole war elapses. The sailing from Argos allows him to leave out the sacrifice that was so crucial in the reminiscence of the elders in the parodos of the *Agamemnon*. This is what a farmer would remember of the war: the recruitment of the men, not as a process (since his small means would have made him ineligible for service), but as a result. He would see the ships set out from the harbor at Nauplia. He says nothing about the sacrifice because he was not there. He feels no regret. Regret is for those who, like Electra, are part of the literary tradition. At the end of the war he might have seen the lavish spoils dedicated on the lofty temples: this would have been a public event (like the festival to Hera and the summons to the assembly in the golden lamb ode) and they would have remained on public view. The chorus was not there either, but they have heard their story from a witness, a survivor of the war. They tell of the progress of the ships and then they are in the thick of the battle.

Themes are built up in the play in an almost epic way of repetition, elaboration, and postponement. The hospitality theme, for example, is elaborated in the scene between the farmer, Orestes, and Electra, and then in the arrival of the old man with the food and drink, where it is upstaged by the recognition. It comes up again in the messenger's description of Aegisthus' invitation and death and finally resurfaces in Electra's invitation to her mother to participate in the sacrifice for the newborn child. The farmer has sent Electra into the house to prepare a meal.[103] What she ultimately prepares,

engage her in mortal combat. But why is the deed that was heroic in Homer, the killing of Aegisthus, not mentioned nor even obliquely alluded to in the ode?

[102] On this ode see the subtle and penetrating work of O'Brien (1964), Walsh (1977), Parry (1978), King (1980), and Morwood (1981).

[103] The uneaten sacrifice is one of the minor, pathetic, tragedies in the play (cf. Jones): Electra does not prepare the meal. The food for the *xenoi* that is brought on

after the arrival of the old man with the knowledge to recognize Orestes, in fact (using the same word 422, 647) is a death trap for her mother. In that last action all the themes of hospitality, motherhood, festivity/sacrifice[104] become inseparable.

Although at the end of the first episode the *autourgos* ceases to be a "focal character" (and is replaced by another rustic character, even more remote from town life) he has been a center of attention, by having the last word in the last scene before the recognition and as well the first word in the play. Further he arouses our curiosity. What is Euripides up to, marrying such a man to Electra, putting such a man in his play at all and most outrageous of all, having a fictional character from real life open a tragedy? Unlike the realistic watchman who opens *Agamemnon* he is not an inevitable palace servant, for whose presence no explanation need be given (what the watchman explains is his assignment and why he is on the roof). And of course he introduces certain central themes, the contrasts, which he tries to blur but which his physical appearance itself puts in heavy relief, between then and now, the haves and have nots, the life of toil and that of legend. He does not come back. Or he comes back as the other rustic, once a palace slave, who does not share his egalitarian impulses, possibly as the messenger[105] whose callousness to the serious aspects of the ambushing of Aegisthus makes him less than sympathetic (or Aegisthus more so), as the sleek Clytemnestra (unless Orestes' actor is also his mother), and as Castor. The third actor's role is thus connected with the hospitality and nurture theme: as the farmer, he tills the earth and invites in guests; as the old man he is the nurturer of the family and he brings the last sacrifice; if he is the messenger he describes the hospitality of Aegisthus and his sacrifice; as Clytemnestra, he is the fertile mother and he *is* the sacrifice; as Castor, he is the kind dispenser, the helper of sailors, but remote from the present action.

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and listed in detail is not eaten. The sacrifice offered by Aegisthus is ruined by the mingling of human and animal blood. Of course the sacrifice for the child is a human sacrifice. The repeated references to food which Michelini (197) finds "profoundly antiheroic" is to my mind one of the more epic (Homeric and heroic) themes in the play. Heroes, after all, eat rather a lot.

[104] On the theme of sacrifice and the ritual motif see Zeitlin (1970:645–69, esp. 651–9).

[105] It might be more effective to have the actor who plays Orestes in this role. Electra would fail to recognize him once again.

3. *Exteriors: Bringing the inside out*

As Suzanne Said[106] points out, scenic space is defined by a series of relations. In this play the significance of the interior scenes has to do with the displacement of the imaginary setting. And yet the actual interior space is the same space (with a different façade) where the other murders took place in other plays, creating a parallelism of indoor murder scenes (of Agamemnon in the past and of past and present Clytemnestras).[107] When we consider what is the special relation of this play to the house in front of which the dramatic action takes place, part of the answer must lie in the strangeness, the combination of the known (a familiar contemporary house rather than an ancient and exotic Cyclopean palace) and the unknown (the abandonment of the traditional setting and with it a sizeable portion of our security in the knowledge that things will come out according to the known end). Orestes' initial inability to become more than a generic nameless character follows from this displacement. His anonymity allows Euripides to explore and exploit the ordinary physical setting and ordinary day to day routines, feelings, and values, and with them the physical condition of Electra, her poverty, her parched skin, her close-cropped hair, her tattered clothing, her dirt, and her virginity. However uncomely Electra's physical state is, it is part of her aesthetic decision to make of herself a real Electra. Not only the author and audience, but the characters are taking part in the debate with the tradition. We see this in her refusal of better clothes and accessories and in the reason she gives for rejecting the kind (but naive) offer of the anonymous young women of the chorus. Agamemnon's daughter sees herself as a mourner, not participating in the joyful events of country or city life: this is the role which becomes her.[108] She will

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[106] Said (1989):108. On tragic space and space in tragedy see Hourmouziades (1965:83–136), Easterling (1987), Seaford (1990:89–90), Padel (1990). See also Said's recent article (1993) in which she locates Argos in the "mental map" of the Greeks (167). See esp. 171, "With the two plays of Euripides, Argos becomes—and it is no surprise—a more complex reality."

[107] Our surprise at being in the country far from everything, not even on the way to anywhere forces us to admit that we are in a world where other plays exist (*pace* Kovacs, 1989:68). We refer to those other versions of the story whether epic, lyric, or dramatic.

[108] She improves on the naive Electra of Aeschylus, a person of a much sunnier disposition (until the *kommos*). Euripides' Electra wants to be caught up in the plots and dark doings in a way that her predecessor is not enmeshed. The later Electra will not accept the passive role of waiting inside or outside the palace. Sophocles'

not go to the temple of Hera in borrowed finery to pretend to be the old Electra, a well brought up princess, leading her contemporaries in the dance (178). That would falsify her position. Her father's murderers keep festival, ride around in chariots, dress, eat, and drink well. These things are not for her. She will stay in and near the hovel to which she has been sentenced, her physical raggedness a reflection outward of its interior and her own. Bereavement, exile and poverty have been imposed upon her, but she makes them more than external conditions. Being socially placeless she cannot go with the other women or with the other girls to the festival of Hera: she has subtly assessed her situation when she explains her refusal to take part in the festivities (310–313). Her religion is not that of the group: it is to mourn her father, alone. She cannot be reintegrated into society until she can lay her father to rest, until she is no longer subject to the tyranny of Aegisthus and can be properly betrothed. As she said early she is an outcast, a πάρεργον of the house, of herself (63).

Although the play is very place-oriented, the spaces are vague. Specific offstage spaces that are more or less important are the **tomb** itself which is from time to time central to our thought: when Orestes reminds Pylades that he visited it and paid his respects and when the old man tells how he found the hair, *et alia.* Electra mentions it to say that a drunken and impious Aegisthus leaps on it and pelts it with stones. Agamemnon—once his laments have been sung by his daughter and his tomb remembered by his son—ceases to be of much interest until the last death scene, when the chorus repeats his death cries (1151–4) while his wife is being killed. This fading of Agamemnon happens partly because his tomb (along with his house) has been displaced: we do not see it; his children do not even try to invoke his power. If we have a clear (specific rather than generic) image of this tomb in mind at all, our picture might be based on the tomb in *Choephoroe*, but a certain amount of untidiness will distort this picture. In Sophocles' *Electra* it is also offstage, but it is the site of rituals that take place believably within the play's time (Orestes sets his libations in an imaginary offstage future; Chrysothemis is sent by her mother; she pauses to be schooled by Electra and given additional offerings;

Electra forms a plan that is frustrated. Euripides' Electra not only forms a plan, but it is the plan that is carried out under her guidance and with her help.

we see her come back all excited about the hair).[109] In Euripides, the two visits to the tomb are placed in an imaginary past of the characters before their respective entrances, making them somewhat more remote, since characters do not exist for the audience until they make their first appearance on stage. The old man does relive his emotions and experiences at the tomb, but at a great remove, since the tomb is not there and in contrast to the bald statement of Orestes about *his* visit to his father's grave (90–93). The old man's tears are a re-enactment of earlier tears, a demonstration of his feelings then, like Electra's constant lament (which, though doubtless sincere for her character, cannot be said to be spontaneous for either character or actor) and like everything an actor does on stage, rehearsed. Euripides draws attention to the fact of rehearsal, the fact that what we are seeing is one more step from reality.

The displacement in this play tells us what that tomb is not: the focus of the family as it had been in Aeschylus, the source of their strength. Electra is her own source of strength, her bitterness and disappointment impel her and enslave her. The focus is away from the mythical, high-born family[110] and this is one result of the displacement of the several offstage spaces: the tomb, the house, the city. The offstage is made to accommodate more detailed spaces, particular spots cut out of the vast outdoors and identified. Electra's departure allows Orestes to introduce himself separately and on the road, rather than at the tomb or nearing his destination (as in Aeschylus and Sophocles respectively). Her world is as circumscribed as and more sensually and spiritually[111] deprived than those of the other Electras. Her husband goes a short distance to the land he farms and returns, we may surmise, when he has finished sowing the seed[112] only to be sent away again to a further distance.

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[109] Much is made of Chrysothemis' visit to the tomb, the redirecting of the offerings and gathering of more sincere offerings from the orphans and of her return with the good news (genuine good news that is, like the good news brought by the first messenger in *Medea*, turned into its opposite). Chrysothemis is the one who forms an image of her brother upon seeing the lock of hair (902–4).

[110] See Paduano (1970):388, Halporn (1983):111–12.

[111] Sophocles' Electra has her mother on whom to take out her frustrations and a sister on whom to impose her stronger will.

[112] Like Electra, he works on the land almost up to the crisis. His work is to be fruitless or the crop gathered by others. His last errand makes him a functional part of the other (heroic) story, like the old man he goes to summon who in turn summons Clytemnestra. The *autourgos* is a stranger to this story and is sent for a more remote character who is more deeply involved in the family.

The **garden of the nymphs** near the road is the most peaceful and idyllic "offstage elsewhere" until Aegisthus is murdered there.[113] It was created as an anomalous murder scene. Details are given not only of the murder, but of the setting. Aegisthus is cutting myrtle when he sees the strangers, crowning himself, an honor denied to the returning Agamemnon (163–5). Aegisthus is always the outsider: in crowning himself he is pretending to be Agamemnon. It is significant that in all three plays the usurper Aegisthus is away from home when Orestes arrives.[114] In this play he is not summoned and does not make an appearance, but paradoxically he is more fully characterized than the other Aegisthuses. His death is given the dignity of a fuller, longer, and more vivid description and he the dignity of a courteous persona.

The most famous and most remote space is of course the **palace** of the sons of Atreus and central **Argos**: this lost space represents the past for Electra, but a tainted past, tainted by the murders she remembers that are contextualized in the Achilles ode and by the adultery of the present, made analogous to that of the past in the golden lamb ode.[115] Even the clean slate of the new setting cannot remove the hatred and bitterness of her memories: in fact the change of setting exacerbates her misery and malice. But the tragedy is that the past she longs for is not real now, if it ever was; that the people she misses are nothing to her now (whether through death, exile, or

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[113] See Rivier (1975), 119–124, on the contrast caused by the change in setting and the contrast between the exterior world of peaceful nature and the inner worlds of the characters.

[114] In the *Choephoroe* Orestes expects Aegisthus to answer the door when he calls; this is the first part of his plan to go wrong. In Sophocles' play, the absence of Aegisthus allows for a reversal of the order of the murders and for Aegisthus to make a late appearance in the play. Electra is able to come outside only because he is absent. Vernant (1985:135) believes that Aegisthus because he is at an alien hearth plays the female role in the *oikos*. It is true that in Aeschylus, the ambiguous sexuality of Clytemnestra renders Aegisthus sexually ambiguous too. But what of the fact that in the plays he is always away from the house? He is not really an alien, but the son of the brother of Atreus, trying to claim the house of his grandfather in the same way his father tried to claim it.

[115] There are several excellent analyses of these odes, including: Headlam (1901: 99–100), Sheppard (1918:140–1), O'Brien (1964), Walsh (1977), Rosivach (1978), King (1980), Morwood (1981). Physical objects, gestures, references to nature and to "unnatural" crimes connect the present to a heroic past that was just as disreputable as the heroic present, but not so shabby. The shabbiness of the present is a timeless poverty which directs us to reassess the past. If Achilles shows up Orestes as less of a hero, so does Orestes tarnish Achilles' glitter by being more real and by turning the icon on his shield into an action that repulses even its agent.

alienation of affections). Electra, as much as Orestes, is banished from her home and expectations. Electra visualizes her mother living in the palace in luxury (her father's hard won luxury) and lying in bed (with Aegisthus and unnamed others, 211–12, 920ff.).[116] And she sees Aegisthus holding her father's sceptre and riding about in his chariot, a mere mannikin, a caricature of her father (319–22). This is the Aegisthus she creates and addresses in her mock lament over his dead body. She pictures details of the palace: chairs, the bath, the clothing of her mother and her servants, their placement by her mother's throne (314–18). The words of glittering finery associated with her mother and the palace become tarnished in the depressing poverty and smallness of her own life, but at least she has the consistency and fortitude to reject the chorus' offer of a finer costume. The ode about the golden lamb and the public scene in the Argive agora changes its focus of attention to private doings inside the palace just as Aegisthus is being sacrificed in the country.

In spite of the focus on the façade not much interior action takes place, just the gathering of the forces inside: Orestes, the weapons, the body of Aegisthus, finally Clytemnestra followed inside by her daughter—until the last murder, after which it is left behind forever, another *oikos* undone. It becomes a sad shell (in its simplicity and poverty almost more pathetic than Jason's house in *Medea*, the house that becomes *his* again after there is nothing left of his inside it). It has become the *skene* we see and nothing more. It had been the home of a simple, good, poor man. At the end it is empty of all *ethos*. The poor man, like everyone else, must leave this place his ancestors tilled (why else does he mention his Mycenaean origins than to increase the pity of his displacement and perhaps to say that circumstances have a lot to do with how the world views the appropriateness of a match?).[117] He will be richer than he was in the Argolid, but an exile. No one cares about him, of course, because he is a fictional character without a myth or history. In the penultimate scene, the splendor of Clytemnestra's appearance comes face to face with

[116] Clytemnestra is said to lie in the murderous bed but Aegisthus is not named with her. Later Electra suggests that her mother's affections are fickle. Strangely the infamous pair is kept apart.

[117] The comic world is not assimilated to this extent, that an unnamed, poor, working man is an appropriate match for a rich man's daughter or sister. Such redistribution of the wealth is frequent in comedy. It has to do with naming.

Electra's rags. This is the *telos* to which the anti-traditional elements have been leading.

The transformation of the news that Orestes is dead into the statement to Electra "he's alive" is one of the benefits of having him unrecognized (he does not have to bother with a disguise since no one knows him)[118] for so long (416, 419). News of him never reaches the palace any more than he himself does, because the whole story is removed from the city of Argos. News *is* brought to Clytemnestra while she is on the road that a non-existent grandson has been born, almost a parody of the usual story (also ambiguously received) that her son is dead. No news comes to Aegisthus at all, only the horrifying aspect of the entrails. And even then he does not know his fate and its appropriateness. If there is an appropriateness.

In her arguments with the old man in the recognition scene, Electra is stressing the differences between herself and her brother.[119] In way of life, hair, and feet they are unlike. In Homer and Aeschylus such tokens of recognition (the means by which, for example, Telemachus is recognized by his similarity to Odysseus) are ethical as well as physical. Telemachus does not share a past with his father, but that,

[118] It turns out that two old men know him, one after careful scrutiny, the other after he has identified himself to the attendants of Aegisthus. Ironically he was not as safe as he thought in coming to the borderland and avoiding the palace. Aegisthus had no idea who he was (no more than Laius recognized Oedipus, although they were of the same stature) because they meet out of context.

[119] See Paduano's excellent analysis of Electra's arguments (1970:388–94). Her arguments are agglutinative rather than strictly logical. She piles up "evidence" because she knows that Orestes is *not* here.

1. Her brother would not come in secret, an argument that separates her from the real Orestes who always comes in secret (it is part of the story; see Kovacs, 1989:69). Men's hair is different from women's, a questionable statement, which may not be either objectively true to the naked eye or visibly true on stage because both the actors are men wearing full head masks and Electra is represented as spending time out of doors and not indulging in preening herself. People who are no kin can have similar hair, true but hardly relevant since it does not explain where the lock of hair came from.
2. How could there be a footprint on rocky ground? A man's foot is larger than a woman's. This may be objectively true in general, but might not be noticeably true on stage where both parts are played by men (see Fitton-Brown, 1961:368).
3. She was too young to weave when Orestes was taken away, showing that Euripides has altered the chronology. She does weave now, we are told to prepare us for this scene. He would be too big to wear anything she had woven when he was little even if such a thing existed. On the tokens, body parts, clothing, scar, see Tarkow (1981, esp. 144–7), Halporn (1983:107–8), Paduano (1970:400).

of course, is one of the purposes of his "Telemachy": he goes into his father's past, meets his father's friends and faces danger and thus develops a story of his own worthy of Homer. Even without a shared past, Telemachus is like his father, not only in feet and other resemblances, but like him in intelligence (cf. the famous "likemindedness" of the members of Odysseus' immediate family, all characterized by epithets that concern their intellect, understanding, or prudence). Electra wants her brother to be like his father or like the father she imagines and to whom she compares him and his feat (336–8; feet, however, she will not compare, for two perfectly probable reasons, but not necessarily right), but the situations are profoundly different.

In the *Odyssey* of course, an *oikos* is being restored. The episodes in the country are preludes to the recovery of the palace and city. That remarkable event can happen because of the likemindedness of all its members; here two *oikoi* (both false, one founded and consummated on adultery and murder, the other on a bride wrongly given and an unconsummated marriage) are being undone, by murder, dissimilarity, alienation, and displacement of the family members. Euripides' Electra in rejecting the tokens rejects everything that in Aeschylus bound the two siblings together in more than like appearance. It was not Electra (as in Sophocles) who saved her brother, but the old minder of their father. There have been no messages assuring her that her brother will come. Nothing in the play leads us to suppose that they ever knew each other. She was only a child at the time of the accident with the tame deer, she would have seen the blood, but not watched the wound become a scar. Only a servant can recognize Orestes. When the two siblings have killed their mother they have no kin except each other and they are to be parted. All they share[120] is "their mother's blood on their hands." Now they have a common past of parallel lives (orphanhood, separation, exile, deprivation, and murder), but no future together. The sad truth is that Orestes has no past, no heroic feats. The accident in the palace is the only past he and his sister had together. She does not remember him nor he her. The beginning of their story is told near its end, but for Orestes there has been no middle. Electra's testimony supplies a *chronos* both within the palace and away from it.

"Where are the ξένοι?" asks the old man (547) who has come to feed them. Electra just put them back into the picture (after the

[120] As Halporn (1983):114 so eloquently puts it.

relatively long digression on the old man's visit to the tomb, what he found there and what he conjectures about his discoveries) by saying ξένος (545),[121] but she does not immediately see the connection between that anonymous stranger who she supposes placed the hair on the tomb and these also anonymous strangers who bring news of her brother. The old man is beginning to intuit a connection between the Orestes he suspects has returned incognito and the "strangers" now inside Electra's house. The scene from the *Choephoroe* is reenacted for us with a different Electra and with a go-between instead of Orestes himself. Orestes in fact is pretending to be a go-between (but without the heroic build-up provided by the *paidagogos* in Sophocles' version). And in the absence of the tomb, the focus of the emotional life of the house in the earlier play(s), there really are no tokens. The hair is really there (in the fictional offstage space, where Orestes in a fictional time before his appearance "put" it), but is not on stage (as it is in the *Choephoroe*); the footprint probably[122] is not there at all even in the fiction that there is a *there* offstage and that someone has sacrificed there; and the weaving never existed at all and cannot be produced as a prop and even if Electra had made a sampler for her brother, her brother is not there (in her mind) to produce it, let alone wear it. Another event (this time non-traditional for this story, but realistic) in the fictional past of the characters has to be invented to produce the present scar. There has to be something to overcome the falsehood and to turn this man into Orestes for Electra. She does her best to prevent this happening.[123]

The recognition scene has been postponed long enough. In this scene (cf. 550 ἐν κιβδήλῳ) we are treated to more self-conscious talk about means of knowing and about ways of determining whether the evidence is true or false.[124] "*If* he is still alive" (557). Does Electra begin to doubt the news brought by her brother's supposed messengers? Even Orestes is ready to be recognized: "Is he comparing me to someone?" he asks, not quite innocent (559). The old man is, of course, comparing Orestes to Orestes: this is also Electra's suggestion

[121] Whatever follows: the text is uncertain.

[122] Electra uses an argument from probability to disprove its existence.

[123] The scar is at least more personal and more pathetic than the masculine and dynastic signet ring Sophocles' Orestes produces to prove he is not in the urn.

[124] For κίβδηλος see Medea 516, Electra 550, Hippolytus 616. On the theme of evidence, see Pucci (1967:365–71).

when she says "perhaps he finds pleasure in seeing a contemporary of Orestes" (560).[125]

Tension is kept up in the recognition scene. We know it is coming when we see the old man who is the only person who can recognize Orestes. When he says "let someone take this into the house for the strangers" we are teased by the possibility[126] that the old man may not even see them. Orestes does come out,[127] to be recognized and identified in front of everyone.[128]

This pathetic old relic of a man provides the continuity that the tomb and the on-going life in the palace give in the other Electra plays. He had cared for Electra when she was a child (487) and had been the one to tend Agamemnon (507, 555) and of course he saved Orestes (556, 285–7, 16–17, 409, 415–16). And yet although expected to make an appearance (once Electra mentions him, that is, once we

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[125] Why would Orestes need to carry tokens around with him? All he really has to do is say "I'm Orestes" but this is hardly dramatic. In each of the plays the recognition is built up. In Aeschylus by Electra's emotion over the tokens. In Sophocles by the false report of Orestes' death and Electra's rejection of the tokens reported by her sister. Here by Electra's rejection of the old man's tokens and potential tokens. It is not as if there are pretenders or impersonators likely to spring up from behind every bush. But these do—spring up that is. The delayed recognition in each case is beautifully original. Orestes pretends in each case to be his own messenger. One variation is in whether or not and how soon he is himself with Electra. On the reference to Orestes' age, see *Odyssey* (19.58–60), on the likeness in age (hands and feet) of Odysseus to the "stranger."

[126] As in *Alcestis* when Admetus almost sends the veiled woman into the house unrecognized and had even tried to send her away.

[127] "Strangers" is his cue too.

[128] Brother and sister have been separated since they were very little and will be permanently separated at the end of the play.

Only a servant can recognize Orestes. Why exactly should this be so? Orestes does not recognize the servant and even makes fun of him. What is most peculiar about this scene is not the rejection of the Aeschylean tokens, but the fact that Orestes does not ever identify himself or recognize anyone. He accepts being Orestes when it becomes necessary for him to do so.

In summary, the similarities with recognitions in the *Odyssey* are few, but crucial. Odysseus' scar (οὐλή) is the means of a very intimate recognition of Odysseus (19.390–), but the connection with the naming of the hero is absent from the play. At 19.389 Eurykleia notes that in *feet*, form and voice the beggar is like Odysseus. In both, the recognition is done by an old servant who sees the scar and who plots to help against the enemies in the house. But everything else is displaced in the drama: the accident to Orestes happens *in* the house (or in the palace grounds) while he is playing with a tame deer. It has nothing to do with his coming of age nor is it a first feat of heroism. The recognition does not have the physical contact of the scene in Homer, nor its potential violence. Orestes lets himself be recognized in front of everybody. The recognition is out in broad daylight (as it has to be in drama) but in a foreign setting (away from the palace) where he really is a stranger.

know he exists) he is not ever more than a utilitarian stage person. And he is not present for very much of the play: this is his only scene. It is he who recognizes Orestes so that the plot can get back on course and away from the scenes of squalid domesticity or simple hospitality, both unsuited to the tragic tradition; he who masterminds the plot against Aegisthus; and he who brings the fatal message to Clytemnestra, besides being the recipient of the information about the false birth that is vital to our understanding of the plot to kill Clytemnestra. Then he disappears. Electra's farmer is mentioned in the divine dispensations at the end of the play but the loyal old servant is not.

The old man gives more details about the tomb and we pause with him. First, why is he crying? Our attention is alerted by the old man's tears and by Electra's list of possibilities: all of them are, of course, related to her family and herself, because that is all there is. She does not ask if he has had a personal loss or pain, because he does not have a personhood to experience anything unrelated to herself, her brother, or her father. He describes what he found at the tomb and what he surmises. It cannot be one of the Argive citizens who attended to the rituals at the tomb. Would a stranger do such a thing and if so, why?[129] But Electra, partly because she *knows* Orestes is *not* here but has sent a messenger, is not prepared to believe that he *is* here. The fact that she has seen him and believed him to be an acquaintance of Orestes, but not Orestes himself is what misleads her. The *knowledge* theme reaches a climax in this scene: Electra says (572), "what mark do you see that I will trust?" Later she does not recognize the messenger (765) who was one of Orestes' men because, she admits (767–8), her excitement had gotten in the way of her wits (we might compare her to the Aeschylean Electra who "sees" Orestes in the lock of hair, *Cho.* 227). Earlier in the play she had not recognized Orestes for other reasons: she does not know him in any way (what he looks like, what sort of person he is) and her expectation[130]

[129] Sophocles' Electra has an answer that fits her "knowledge": those who brought his remains paid their respects.

[130] She had to have some mental picture of her brother to sustain her. But this picture is ambiguous. She sees him as a poor wanderer, an outcast like herself, and as a man ready for action, like herself, egged on by circumstances. In fact, while she has had to live the family anguish in all its particulars, he has been almost untouched by it except in the most general way. She, removed from her father's hearth and yet immobile, provides the stability and the memory: this is the feminine role and responsibility.

has been of someone else, someone more like her father, and he says he is someone else. Can the play be saying something about the frailty of knowledge and the impossibility of certainty? "If you cannot trust Apollo, whom can you believe?" asks Electra when Orestes wonders if he should go through with the matricide. But of course you cannot trust Apollo. Orestes' hesitation, in identifying and becoming himself, was right. His arrival is the ἀκμή but he needs time to know what to do and what to be. Electra has had that time: her part, as always, has been to wait, to embody the *chronos* and to pass it on to Orestes in a compressed, economic form. Only in this version does she not only create her own identity, but also her brother's.

The existence of a youthful weaving is suggested by the old man and we know that the matron Electra does weave now, but pathetically weaving only utilitarian garments for herself and her household, not lovingly making a lasting and valued gift for her brother. The phytic garment is both invented by Electra and mocked by her. They were only unformed children, grown now into adults with specific and recognizable characters, but not for each other. Their new ties with Pylades, with the *autourgos*, emphasize the lack of personal ties between the brother and sister. Euripides has moved the scene and changed the ages of the siblings when they parted, making the Aeschylean tokens no longer relevant,[131] no longer even there,[132] no longer possible.[133]

Even for all Electra's biting rationalism the old man is not put off his task. Where are the strangers (547)? He has performed what he was sent for, to bring the food, drink, and garlands and he could logically be dismissed now, but in fact he has not yet done what he was made for and that, of course, is to recognize Orestes for Electra, so that Orestes can begin to play his traditional role and be his traditional self: locations tell him who his enemies are, but a placeless, wandering man, has no identity in the social setting. Like his sister, Orestes, now that he is too old to remain safe and content in the shelter provided by Strophios, is socially non-existent. Even when he finds his sister, the fact that she no longer belongs to his Argive family, leaves him still an alien. The arrival of the old man who had

[131] Many unrelated people have hair of the same color.

[132] The ground near the tomb is rocky and would not bear a footprint.

[133] Electra was physically too small to handle a loom before she and Orestes were parted.

been his, his father's, and his sister's tender is the crucial factor to change him into a native. The old man suspects from the hair that Orestes is nearby. Orestes told *us* about the hair so that it could come up again. The old man's first attempt is foiled and so he tries some other traditional tokens. The scene is crafted masterfully. As Solmsen notes, it would be intolerably flat to have the old man go straight to the scar without this introduction which concentrates our attention on the coming recognition. The means of recognition is the result of an event that places Orestes squarely in the palace.

The old man at first sight of the strangers (as Orestes has already done in more detail, with more pretension) expresses doubt concerning the means of knowing good men and the unreliability of immediate appearances.[134] As the old man circles Orestes he is looking for just such an external mark (χαρακτῆρ', 559), not for a means of knowing the inner nature of the young man. But the very action of circling Orestes brings him literally into greater relief, gives him a three dimensionality that he lacked before as his own (anonymous, functional) messenger. The old man with his magic circling walk charms this stranger into being Orestes.

How Orestes got his scar requires no long digression as Odysseus' does in the *Odyssey*. This was an innocent time in the past. It was a trauma, no doubt, to Orestes and forgotten by Electra; it does not reveal Orestes' *ethos*. The scene is almost comic, but is at the same time very painful because it leaves no doubt about the alienation of the brother and sister. And yet Orestes *has* come to Argos. He does not fail to be seen by the old man. The oracles are firm (planted in the ground), he had said half reluctantly, half wanting to be questioned further (at his first exit/entrance into the house 399–400). The inability of Electra and Orestes to know each other is the saddest part of the general condition that no one in the play is able to be anything to anyone else.[135] Even after the recognition Orestes has

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[134] Cf. Medea's bitter remarks on judging before you know the inner being of a person paradoxically coupled with the longing for an external mark.

[135] Everyone (except the mute Pylades) is in a false position: Electra as the virgin/wife; the farmer as the unworthy husband; even the adulterous pair are afraid to be seen together and have been separated for the time of the play; Clytemnestra's logic does not stand up since she is hardly a real mother to her surviving children; Orestes hides as long as he can. After the business they are to be separated forever. Castor though himself once a mortal and the uncle of Electra and Orestes does not understand their situation. Though able to help sailors in trouble they could do nothing to help their own sister and her children. Menelaus and Helen arrive too late.

doubts and, unlike the other Oresteses, he has no plan except (89) to kill the murderers and must be led by others, his sister, the old man, and even Aegisthus.

In the recognition scene more than any other in the play the focus is on the family, but even so includes some signs of alienation. Orestes is the beacon light (587) which is another link with his parents, he is the fulfillment of the signal fires announcing the fall of Troy and the homecoming of Agamemnon. And he is incidentally both himself and his own herald (the character and not just the actor playing both roles as probably happens in *Agamemnon*). The embrace of the siblings is cut short as it must be in the other plays, but only in this one without the chance of its being resumed (cf. Orestes' pointed remark at 597). So is the summoning of powers; the real and affecting *kommos* is dislocated and placed after the murders. One reason for the curtailment of the *kommos* (671–85) is that Agamemnon's tomb is not there. Everything is offstage. Little of the real (as opposed to the pretended)[136] action is focused on this house or even takes place in the space in front of it[137] until the end. The house is

[136] What is presented in front of the spectators? Mostly lies. Not just the ordinary lies that make up any drama, but lies even within the framework of the drama itself. There is the sham marriage of Electra; Electra's ambiguous motivation for helping on the farm; the disguised Orestes; the unrealized entertainment of guests; the food brought for a meal that is to go uneaten; the clues to identity rejected (and some of those even non-existent) and a new clue invented that is not part of the story (the scar of Orestes); the false news of a child born and the invitation to sacrifice. Within the lies are more lies. No one's motives are above suspicion (not even the farmer's, since he *is* suspected by Orestes). Electra pretends to be carrying water to help on the farm, not utter pretense, but it is her second motive. The water has little relevance to the action, except as a literary allusion, as a means of showing the nature of the house, to make Orestes' mistaking his sister for a slave more plausible, and perhaps as part of a water motif. Orestes pretends he is someone else, a generic character, to his sister, the chorus, the "husband" and to Aegisthus. The strangers are invited twice to a meal that does not happen. After all the lies a truth is revealed on the eccyclema, the tangle of corpses and their bloodied murderers, their sometime victims. Death is the truth, even of the war fought for a phantom. Another truth is a continued life for Orestes and Electra, separated from each other, but also from Argos, the place and its myths that poisoned their lives and turned them into a sham.

[137] That is, the characters talk about their actions but do not perform them within our view. 1. The farmer tells the background and then says he is going to work. He goes. 2. Electra laments (this is a real action to be sure) and says she is going to get water. 3. Orestes says that he has sacrificed and cut a lock for his father and that he is looking for news of his sister. The two meet; news is shared but there is no recognition. The recognition much later does take place onstage. The plans are made onstage and the murder committed offstage (as is usual). Electra holds a non-*agon* with the dead Aegisthus. The persuasion of Clytemnestra takes place on stage

there in an ordinary way (that is, not as the haunting presence of *Agamemnon* and *Choephoroe*) as Electra's house, which she keeps as an ordinary housewife would, but with more drama and mythology.

Noteworthy also is the absence of the gods except as expletives or clichés until a couple of them appear *ex machina*. Τύχη (cf. 610) is (realistically) acknowledged as playing a part: the old man *happened* to see Aegisthus just off the road he was travelling; the luck and hands of Orestes will restore him to his rightful place (which of course is not to be). The victims are caught away from home. It is for something more than to serve realism that the play is removed from the palace. The palace guard and other household slaves who accompany Aegisthus to the nymphaion are represented as neither loyal nor strong, but as the aged slave says, slavish. They could have been equally "slavish" at home. Clytemnestra too is attended only by servants, decorative women and serving men who go off stage and do not come back, hardly a security guard.

In the other Electra plays (the *Choephoroe* and the *Electra* of Sophocles) the house is suffocatingly there. Only Orestes is the outsider. The others, Electra (and her sister) and Clytemnestra, share an unwanted intimacy that extends even to knowledge of Clytemnestra's self-betraying dreams. In this play there is some talk about Clytemnestra in bed, but it is vague and generic (211–212, 918–24, 1036–8). The old man knows that Aegisthus does not sleep well (617: part, perhaps, of the gossip that is said to circulate about the notorious pair, 643, 930–31). But in this *Electra* there is no confessed dream, only the momentary terror of Aegisthus looking at the entrails but with no time for him to reflect and understand that he has made a terrible mistake. He never comes to any self awareness as his namesake does perhaps in Sophocles' play, but he has been uneasy for a long time and has tried in the desperate logic of the criminal (which is also the most effective antidote to the revenge ethic) to fix his earlier crimes by adding more crimes (the aborted murders of the children) to them.

Orestes goes off to an imaginary middle distance, not so very far away as to be out of earshot (the chorus, by claiming to hear sounds from the murder scene, makes it more real to the audience: the audience will know that these amorphous sounds are part of the play), to one of Aegisthus' country estates along the road. While that murder

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with Electra seemingly doing everything she can (as is often noted) to foil her own plan. The final truth is the despair of brother and sister.

is to be imagined as taking place the chorus sings of an event in the city and of secret criminal doings in the palace. The golden lamb is brought from the country to the city and becomes an object of treachery. The country, however, will turn out to be just as squalid as the city, so that the purity or simplicity of the country is yet another false criterion, another cliché, another example of nostalgia for something never known.[138] Another beginning to the story is given in the stasimon, further back in time than the farmer's summary had gone or than the chorus had in the Achilles ode. In this ode a beginning is given to the story of Aegisthus, just before he is killed offstage. The parallel is explicitly drawn between his own illicit union with Clytemnestra and that between Thyestes and his brother's wife. Thyestes did not kill the brother whose wife he seduced (all the worse for him). The shocking human outcome of the story, the cooking and eating of Thyestes' children, is not mentioned. Of the middle of the story, what motivated Aegisthus beyond the political and amorous, there is not even a whisper. And the cosmic outcome, the reversal of the sun's course, seems ludicrous when we consider that to the chorus in the play's chronological context, it refers to recent history, within the memory of the older generation. The connectedness of things has been lost. The chorus makes analogies but without the links. Each act is a separate crime, not part of a pattern but of a chaos of isolated unhappy events.[139]

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[138] Orestes had said that he had heard that a poor man is more hospitable than a rich man. But how could anyone be more hospitable than Aegisthus once his fears are allayed? He is not even excessively cautious, as if he expected Orestes to say "I am Orestes," if ever he were to come. And what if he had? Aegisthus' bodyguards are men of easy loyalty.

[139] After Electra recites her woes, the chorus suggests (213–14) that Helen was the cause of many woes to the Hellenes and to Electra's family. But Helen was not the cause. Iphigenia was killed for nothing unless for the magnificent spoils set up in the temples and for Clytemnestra's handmaids (whom she sees as a substitute, however inadequate for her daughter, 1001–3). Agamemnon's success, his gifts to the gods did him no good. Then again, to Clytemnestra, Iphigenia's death was not her principal motive for murder, but Agamemnon's fascination with Cassandra. Clytemnestra's argument, however, is spurious since she seems to have already been imitating Agamemnon's wayward behavior long before he brought Cassandra home. Aegisthus is given no other motive than political and erotic ambitions (similar to Thyestes' motives), but not the powerful spur he has in Aeschylus. Aegisthus gained the palace, but seems to be absent most of the time (Electra pictures him riding in her father's chariot, leaping on her father's grave; he is out on the estates when he is killed): he owns it (947) but it does not belong to him. Orestes' motive is to regain his patrimony. He is reluctant to kill his mother. What does it all add up to? Iphigenia is dead. Troy and the heroes who defended it and those who attacked it (Achilles

Aegisthus is called "son of Thyestes" by the farmer (10) when he is trying to give as much background as possible, using proper nouns as a kind of shorthand.[140] Again, the old man (naively) tells Orestes how he is to succeed in recovering his city and paternal home (613) "by killing the son of Thyestes and your mother." Electra (773) asks about the murder of "the son of Thyestes." Between these latter two uses of the patronymic, the chorus has sung of the beginning of the feud between the two brothers and Thyestes' trick. By the end of the play another set of siblings is to be estranged not by a feud, but by a crime they commit together. While they sing, the last of the sons of Thyestes is being killed by Orestes' trick, though nothing yet has been said to make us think he does not deserve it. A moment before they hear the shout offstage the chorus sings, turning their attention to Clytemnestra, "unmindful of which (that is, stories that are meant to dissuade people from wrong-doing) you kill(ed) your husband," establishing an analogy between the two sets of murders and a similarity between the murderers and their victims.

As often in Euripides a villain or unsympathetic character who becomes a victim (e.g. Jason, Pentheus) is given a second hearing at the end of his life or at the tragic end of his story. So here with Aegisthus.[141] Aegisthus is a gracious host, openhanded and unsuspecting. Orestes' earlier wish (397–8) made upon entering the farmer's house comes true and he is invited to take refreshment and spend the night with a host better off than Electra's farmer.

Electra asks the messenger for the "rhythm" of the murder (772). And the messenger gives her the details, including eleven direct quotations (see de Jong, 18). The setting is very different from that of the other murders (in this and the other Electra plays) and includes details of setting that call attention to themselves. The change of setting itself makes this messenger's speech possible; usually Aegisthus' death takes place inside the palace and does not require

is specifically highlighted) are dead. Agamemnon is dead. Aegisthus is dead. Clytemnestra is dead. Orestes and Electra are matricides and exiles. Nothing is really connected. The grim inner necessity that goads on Aeschylus' characters to perfect the curse and to embody the inherited *ate* in turn is gone.

[140] In the first 49 lines of his monologue he uses thirty-six proper nouns, including the name *Aegisthus* seven times; in Castor's long speech a similar number of proper nouns is to be found.

[141] See de Jong (1990):14–19, who argues that there is pity for Aegisthus because of the manner of his death, like an animal at a sacrifice, and because of the contrast between the idyllic setting and its bloody outcome (19).

an elaborate messenger's speech. The offstage cries are heard as is usual during murders, but are so far away that their meaning and their source is uncertain. They are among the signs that are difficult to read. Aegisthus' death is given short shrift in the *Choephoroe* and actually takes place after the end of Sophocles' *Electra*. In Euripides we are even told about the road[142] off which the sacrifice is taking place. And we are given details of the sacrificial implements with their national origins. But what is most impressive is Aegisthus' friendly, bantering tone. He is not what we have expected and yet the old man had known that he would invite the strangers, just as Electra knows her mother will come if called. Orestes can be whatever he is said to be. The oracle, the old man, Electra, all tell him what to do, what to be. Here Aegisthus gives him his role along with weapons and even teases him about using them. Orestes accepts these roles and plays them as he must if he is to be the traditional Orestes. Unlike Electra he does not make himself. His uncle Castor from the *mechane* continues the creation and direction of Orestes' role. After the play he is to go to Athens and be tried and acquitted, and after that he ceases to be an Orestes we know or care about.

Aegisthus calls out his greeting to the strangers. The picture of this cordial Aegisthus at his ease in his own country place, far from the palace (which even when he has cleared it of his enemy and his enemy's children is never really his own and at the end it is no one's) is strikingly distinct from any other Aegisthus.[143] He is enjoying himself, but is never relaxed. His warm greeting to the travellers, his unguarded invitation, and foolish request to the strangers to participate in the dismemberment of the sacrificial victim show perhaps that like any tyrant he is a lonely man and can have friendly, human relations only with strangers and in an out of the way setting. His entourage is clearly made up of servants; no Argive citizens arc present (the Argives go in fear of him and would not dare to tend to Agamemnon's tomb; and they whisper about him and his wife).[144] Because of this isolation he betrays himself to his enemy. The scenic displacement calls attention to itself in a number of ways: though the murders are always unseen and so could be said to take place anywhere, the idyllic

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[142] Cf. Denniston *ad* 775, and Cropp *ad loc.* for interpretations of the word δίκροτον.

[143] Bernand (1985:248–9) calls him "une sorte de roi champêtre."

[144] Even the absent citizens have deteriorated from their outspoken contempt for the bully Aegisthus which they show at the end of *Agamemnon*.

setting is carefully set at odds with the horrible deed done there. Aegisthus' congeniality and xenophilic piety ill fits the man who leaps drunkenly on Agamemnon's tomb and pelts it with stones.[145] Fear gives Aegisthus a continuity of character, and hatred born of fear: he is never free of the enemy he killed. The sleeping murder of Agamemnon (41–2) keeps him awake. He has become a figure somewhat like Menelaus in the *Odyssey*, who also welcomes the strangers to a festival, but spends his nights regretting those who died or were lost for his cause especially the father of the young man he has welcomed to his home. Clytemnestra, too, regrets. Regret and disappointment are the dominant emotions in this play. They—even more than fear—are the reward of those who have their way.

The setting is defined (like that of a play) by movements inside and out of the building on Aegisthus' estate (interiors: 787, 790, 802), probably to be envisioned as a building maintained solely for the purposes of storing the things necessary for the sacrifice and of being a kind of offstage interior near which the dramas of sacrifice are to be performed (cf. Osborne *BSA* 80, 122). And then we hear of his terror as he sees the σπλάγχνα (828, 838) and examines them more closely (839, διαιρῶν, "taking them apart") in the hope of seeing something less terrifying. Aegisthus' violent hands are tamed now (at 788 he takes Orestes by the hand; at 826 he takes the ἱερά into his hands; cf. 10, 17, 28, 322). Now everything depends on the "luck and hands" of Orestes (cf. 610). And those misshapen entrails (826–9) are the last things Aegisthus sees as he bows before the blow (839), accepting it as a beast for sacrifice is caused to assent to its death. The scene is unforgettable, as good as anything in the genre of messenger speeches.[146] This is the longest report of the death of an Aegisthus and it is told as something of an adventure in a standard messenger speech. Compare this to the brilliant *kommos* after the killing of Clytemnestra that performs the function of a messenger's speech by telling us (and reenacting with dance and gesture and words)

[145] There are in this play, more than usual, levels of non-action. A lot of things do not happen in a Greek play: for example in the *Electra* the sun does not reverse its course. The murder of Aegisthus does not happen, but we hear it and we see its result. The narrator is reliable. The drunken and half-crazed Aegisthus is another story: a number of critics consider it a fantasy of Electra's. Aegisthus in the garden of the nymphs is not at home lording it in Agamemnon's palace, but displaced. He is presented as separated from his crimes and so humanized. We see the result of his wrong-doing in the exile and misery of his cousins.

[146] See de Jong's fine assessment of the ironies in the messenger's speech, 1990:14–19.

how the second murder was done in the presence of the corpses of the victims.[147]

The murderers of Aegisthus are crowned[148] on the spot and again on stage by Electra when she compares Orestes' victory over Aegisthus to her father's victory at Troy (an indication of how obsessed she has become with revenge, since she has already pointed out the difference, 336–7). She is almost reluctant to speak to the dead Aegisthus, but does so, working herself up to a venomous denunciation.[149] She talks about how she spent her time before and we have seen an enactment/rehearsal of this in the early morning scene. Now she talks about what went on in the palace interior, in the bed chamber of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Her speculation about Clytemnestra's infidelities to Aegisthus (an argument, and a spurious one at that, from probability) is not borne out by anything else in the play. Clytemnestra's modest demeanor at her entrance removes any doubt. Aside from the references to Clytemnestra in bed and the putative foppishness of Aegisthus,[150] this is a sententious speech as unpleasant in content as in appearance, being made as it is to the dead body of Aegisthus. Electra sends the body inside to the darkness (959–61) where he is to be hidden from Clytemnestra's view.[151] Her imperious tone to the attendants intimates how easily she could return to the old way of life; she is a harsher, hoarser, more determined version of her mother. She must carry the sexual ambiguity that was so prominent in the Aeschylean Clytemnestra; in this play her mother is thor-

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147 Cf. Matthiessen, 1963:144–66.

148 For an original perspective on the athletic imagery in this and other Electra plays see Myrick (1994):138–41, 148.

149 Her speech to the dead Aegisthus seems almost a parody of the ritual lament (see Alexiou, 1974:161–84).

150 Again, we have a fuller description and characterization of Aegisthus than usual. His maidenly good looks are a surprise. It is hard after his coarseness in the *Agamemnon* where he bullies the chorus, to think of the same son of Thyestes as an ornament on the dance floor. Electra, I believe, undercuts her own denunciation of the man. Then again, he always was something of a mannikin, pretending to be king because he had the accoutrements of royalty: the sceptre, the chariot, the house, the wife of the king. His cruelty and vulgarity can be seen as being of a piece with his lack of ethical definition, as can his friendliness and candor to the outsiders. He shares many of the characteristics of the handsome outlaw who is hardly ever all bad whether in *cantistorie*, ballads, or gangster movies. But still he is wicked and the ambiguous forces of justice always get him.

151 There is to be no recognition of his body, no connection of the two murders in the understanding of the second victim (as there is in Aeschylus and Sophocles, where the first victim is displayed to the second). The two bodies will lie together on the *eccyclema* but they die as separate victims killed almost for different reasons.

oughly feminine (and even feminist for a moment, raising the audience's consciousness, if not her daughter's,[152] to the foolishness of the double standard of sexual morality, 1041–8).

4. *Inside Out*

Clytemnestra's arrival in the chariot with her Trojan handmaids is what is so aptly called a "moving tableau";[153] she appears much as she had been described earlier by Electra (314–18). It is as if the other offstage interior (the palace, the throne room where Clytemnestra sits in superficial glory) is set in motion and not only comes outside but goes to the country. It is this contrast of her resplendent person and entourage beside the poverty of Electra that kills her, that has so set Electra against her and become to Electra a symbol of all the ills that have befallen those she loves: her own and Orestes' penury and exile, the murder of her father and his place taken by another, a lesser man, the fact that the Trojan spoils her father won are enjoyed by his killers. The arrival of Clytemnestra in the chariot with the Trojan women reminds us of the arrival home of Agamemnon as it is staged in Aeschylus' play. She steps down from the chariot with the help of the slaves (999, 1007). Electra's reaction to her mother's femininity (for example, her needing help to get down from the chariot) and finery is to offer herself as a handmaid (1004–6), not without a sharp remark. Even that gesture of submission (whether ironic or genuine or both) is rebuffed by Clytemnestra, though not sharply. She simply tells her daughter not to bother (1007). There is to be no physical contact between them until they are all together inside the house. This inability of the characters to be anything to each other continues to be the essence of their tragedy. Electra, the abused and banished child, cannot even be her mother's servant and so reenter either her affections or her father's house in that unconventional way. The Aeschylean Clytemnestra's magnificent persuasion of Agamemnon not to let the foot that trampled Troy touch the ground (denying her husband even the simple pleasure his herald enjoyed of touching the

[152] All her daughter learns from Clytemnestra's brilliant and surprising logic is that an argument is appropriate in her retort; for she seems to miss the sexual inequality and insult her mother brings up as a motive and dwells mainly on the homicidal successions.

[153] Halleran (with bibliography) 1985:11, 14–15.

Argive soil) is reduced here to a squalid tirade and the snide warning from daughter to mother to be careful not to soil her dress.

Nor is Clytemnestra whom we expect her to be. She is obviously costumed in elegant, festive clothing, dressed up for a feast with Aegisthus. But she is easily diverted from her original purpose of joining in the festivities at the nymphaion by her daughter's call and does not seem frightened of the child her daughter says she has borne (*pace* Kubo) but curious and sympathetic and perhaps looking for a reconciliation, as if words of regret or forgiveness could right so great a wrong. In spite of the fact that she has a plan and the success of her plan depends on her mother's good will, Electra cannot or chooses not to curb her acerbic tongue. Her mother tries to explain her actions (giving a multiplicity of motives), answering Electra's πατρός (1010) with her long speech about what Electra's πατήρ (1011) did. She tries to give her side of what was done in the *oikos*, a woman's version, even admitting to feminine "folly" and weakness (1035). In her retort, Electra questions only the timing, asserting that her mother was "bad" even before the sacrifice (and showing that Electra was already somewhat hostile to her mother in the old days, during the war). The speech gives intimate details of what happened in the palace during those years (Clytemnestra beautifying herself, 1070–75) and even what was going on in Clytemnestra's mind (that she was glad when the Trojans did well and hoped Agamemnon would be killed, 1076–9, unlike her Aeschylean counterpart who was afraid that death would find him before she could kill him herself). Electra does omit to say that by that time Iphigenia had been slaughtered; her reference to the death of her sister is not about her mother's feelings but a "logical" argument about how vendettas work (1086–96). What is most bewildering about this speech (as has been noticed often before; see esp. Kubo) is that by threatening her mother she jeopardizes the plan (1093–6), working at cross-purposes to her own *mechanema*. Can it be that we are meant to wonder if with some part of her heart or mind she wants the murder plan to fail? But her mother does not cooperate with that desire of her daughter's if it is there. She refuses to be the epic and tragic *bad* woman her daughter needs. Her mother *forgives* her (by generalizing the condition: some children love their father more than their mother, 1101–5), feels sorry for her (in respect to the more trivial aspects of her situation, but ones Electra had talked about to realistic excess, 1130, 1107–8), and admits that she is not happy over her past deeds (1105–6), admitting that she is

sorry she "pushed her anger so far" (1109–1110). If this is not a warning to Electra of the sort the chorus sings of in the second stasimon, what else could it be? This is Electra's last chance to stop before it is too late. Like all the others she does not see that the warnings apply to her.

The contrast of opulence beside squalor keeps coming up until she utters her last words to her mother to be careful of her dress. The dress is to figure in the murder scene and in the repentance. It will be soiled not with soot but with blood and used to cover the brutalized body of the mother at once recognized and rejected as mother.

The chorus sings (reprising a theme from Electra's monody) of the earlier murder of Agamemnon in his bath in the *other* house and his pitiful death cries ring out once more in the house in tandem with his wife's (1165, 1167, 1170–1). The two offstage interiors are presented at once, both as murder scenes, the husband and wife reunited, with Clytemnestra now in the farmer's house falling beside the dead body of her second mate (as Agamemnon had fallen with his concubine). Clytemnestra's death cries are heard now from within. The little hovel cries out as shrilly as the palace with its towering Cyclopean walls had done years ago. During the murders, the two houses become one. The chorus even refers to this poor village house as if it were the house of the Tantalids (1175) and it is.

The water jug left at the door in the first episode is another reminder of Agamemnon's uncompleted bath and the promise of welcome that is not fulfilled. And a reminder that his house, long occupied by his murderers, is also (like the farmer's house) emptied and reduced to its façade, only we cannot see it.

The bodies are rolled out as the brother and sister enter/exit from the scene of the real action covered with blood. The bodies lie in disarray. We see the result of the interior scene. The killers look to their future not because they are thinking of themselves (*pace* England), but because they are horrified by what they have done and can think of little but the pollution they have earned from their deed. And then they relive the death scene, which could not be more vividly retold if it were performed as a messenger's speech instead of a *kommos*. Their mother bared her breast (1207) and the limbs that gave them birth fell to the floor (1208–9) . . . and her hair (1209, reading τὰν κόμαν) . . . Orestes cannot finish. She reaches out (1214–15) to touch Electra's cheek (following Wilamowitz), or Orestes' (depending on the

distribution of parts here), and is left clinging as she falls (1216–17, cf. Denniston *ad loc.*). In the dim light of the hut Clytemnestra sees her two children armed against her and reaches for her daughter. But Orestes covers his face and stabs, Electra urging him on and guiding the sword (1221–6). Each accepts blame. The *kommos* like so many things has been displaced from the earlier enactments of the story. No longer a summoning of the powers of their dead father, it has become a howlingly painful song of mourning for their dead mother and regret for the matricides' own part in the killing. And yet perhaps it does summon the Dioscuri as comforters.

The number of place names[154] in the exodos signals the diaspora of the characters, the final displacement and separation of the children of Agamemnon. The house of the Atreidai is no more. Beginning with the cause of the Trojan War it has all been a mistake. The Dioscuri blame Apollo even for Electra's share in the murder (1305). Helen did not even go to Troy (1280–83). Zeus sent a phantom instead.[155] The war that set everything in motion was fought for nothing. There is something jejune about the dispensations of the Dioscuri. We have, after all, seen the play and have seen how secular, how little dependent on the gods, it has been. Even the almost comic old man has enough sense to know how Orestes is to regain his heritage. It really does not need Apollo's oracles.

Electra had come out with the hydria, bringing out the interior, informing us a little about the nature of the house we see and whose interior we are to imagine. This would doubtless call to mind, as has been mentioned before and by others, the opening of *Choephoroe*, in which also the libation vessels—as we learn little by little—are associated with the *ethos* of the house and what goes on there. But Electra's pot is just an ordinary water jug any rural housewife or her servant would carry to the well or stream (or any urban woman to the fountain house). It is a sign of the simplicity of the dwelling at the beginning

[154] 1242, 1250, 1254, 1274, 1277, 1278, 1279, 1281, 1283, 1285, 1287, 1288, 1289, 1313, 1319–20, 1334, 1343, 1347.

[155] In every instance the interference of the gods causes problems for the people and leads them to crimes and violence: Apollo's oracle; Pan's gift of the golden lamb; Zeus' phantom Helen; even the gentle Nereids who conduct the ships to Troy and the well-intentioned dispensations of the Dioscuri. Roberto Calasso (*The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, translated by Tim Parks, New York, 1993:387) writes, "To invite the gods ruins our relationship with them but sets history in motion. A life in which the gods are not invited isn't worth living. It will be quieter, but there won't be any stories."

of the drama. But the house becomes more and more complex as things are brought to it and people, especially outsiders, enter it.[156] What is brought to it, in answer to Electra's prayers or summons, turns it into a criminal space, dark not only because of lack of light but because of dark and evil deeds and deaths. What is hidden in it finally, when her mother comes to help her with the fictitious child of a fictitious marriage, is Aegisthus' dead body and Agamemnon's only son. Only the farmer going off to work and Electra carrying the water jug come out until first Electra (after making one kind of simple household preparations) comes out to meet the elderly servant and then Orestes exits for the recognition. Electra after making preparations of another kind inside exits to hear the news. In the final tableau the interior where so much is finally concentrated explodes onto the stage. The mourning of Electra for her father, her brother and herself becomes the mourning of Orestes and Electra for their mother, themselves, and each other.

Electra and her brother go their separate ways, leaving behind the house of the Mycenaean farmer with its pathetic array of furnishings and the special things gathered for the feast that is never eaten and the bodies of their kin, no longer theirs, but to be buried by others, Aegisthus by the citizens of Argos (who perhaps do not despise him as much as we had been led to believe now that he is dead) and Clytemnestra by her now innocent sister, who was not, after all, the cause of many woes to the Greeks and to Electra's house (213–14) and by Menelaus who was. The forgotten water pot lies on the stage, a relic of a pre-mythical country time, with its rhythm of men's and women's repetitive and equalizing activities that sustain life. Electra's housework has been interrupted. The house is abandoned. All the domestic details add to the pathos.

The mythical world has consumed the real world as it always does in tragedy. The fantasies of tragic artists end in disaster. But it is from these tales that even a farmer's wife can create a story for herself to give more glamour to her life and the dignity of a history.

[156] The farmer returns to his home but (like Orestes and his home) he does not enter it but sends the strangers inside. He never enters his home again either. By the time Electra enters it the last and the penultimate times, she no longer belongs to it, but to her natal family, once Orestes is recognized and she can claim her paternal family. Even her first return is with new hope that she will soon not belong to this house on the fringes of society and political life.

* * *

Electra created the characters to fit the story she had to be part of, which was the traditional story, and she killed off or traumatized her fictions and herself. No one lived up to her expectations or projections whether of goodness or evil except possibly the silent shadow figure Pylades, Orestes' idealized companion. The character she made for herself, rehearsing it over the years of her neglect, and performing it for the gods, her brother, the chorus, and the audience, is undone at the end by her regret. Even she could not sustain her aesthetic identity and live up to the traditional story in the center of which she placed herself. Electra, like her mother, is sorry. In the immediate horror of what she has done, she cannot even remember why she pushed her anger so far.

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CHAPTER THREE

PHOENISSAE: ON ARES' CROWNS
ἐπ' Ἀρηίοις στεφάνοισι

They will never die who fight so embraced
breath to breath eye knowing eye impossible to die
or move . . .
. . . never to die but to be endless
a golden prince of pictorial war
Gregory Corso

1. *Introductory Remarks: Why the* Phoenissae?

The *Phoenissae* is hardly anyone's favorite Greek tragedy any more.[1] But it was very popular in later antiquity and in the Middle Ages: it has the fullest scholia of any Euripidean play (with only *Orestes* coming close) and more surviving pieces of ancient manuscripts than any other tragedy.[2] It was part of the ancient canon, but now is hardly ever read by a reader who is not a professional classicist or at least an avid (not to say obsessive) amateur with list in hand of all the extant tragedies to be (read and) ticked off one by one.[3] Despite its now and (we may venture to expect)[4] future neglect there is something

[1] Recently, however, my students have enjoyed the "historical" aspects of the play and the opportunity to see some of the characters usually omitted. Pearson in his 1909 edition for the Pitt Press Series wrote, "It is small wonder that the play has always been a favourite," (xxxi).

[2] See Bremer (1984):284 for the papyrological evidence.

[3] The canon of Greek tragedy has shrunk considerably from its ancient two dozen or so plays to a very very few (sometimes no more than one) in the most basic world literature courses to a handful in Greek literature in translation. Even a semester course devoted entirely to Attic tragedy cannot cover all the plays we have and does not necessarily stick to the ancient canon, but includes one or another Iphigenia play, perhaps Euripides' *Electra*, his *Helen*, or his *Ion*. The canon of literary works, with changing taste, with shifting values, and new awareness, has always changed whether gradually or radically. Even so it seems hardly likely that the *Phoenissae* will ever again be read as a masterpiece rather than as a curious artefact, an exercise in literary archaeology.

[4] Tastes change, even the tastes of people whose taste is accepted as setting a trend or establishing the canon. But we are not accustomed to thinking of changing tastes as affecting the fates of anything so currently esoteric as Greek tragedy. I

especially Euripidean[5] about the play, certainly something (intellectually and aesthetically) challenging, and as well some hauntingly beautiful images and songs[6] and people of courage, dignity, and spunk.

What are some of the most attractive features of this ungainly work, the well-stuffed (παραπληρωματικόν) drama, full of many good ideas or sentiments (γνωμῶν μεστὸν πολλῶν τε καὶ καλῶν), besides being rich in characters (πολυπρόσωπον) and feelings (περιπαθεῖς)?[7] Perhaps the play's most dramatically exciting feature is the barrage of surprises which begin[8] at once. And Euripides continues to surprise his audience until the departure of Antigone with her father, leaving the body of her brother unburied, but lying there on stage with two corpses too many (those of Jocasta and Menoeceus) for this piece of the legend.[9] At the center amid the murk of selfishness and the metallic glint of war a heroic man, of whose existence in mythological genealogies we had quite probably been unaware, glitters and is gone. He is granted one heroic speech and then is heard (and very nearly heard of) no more. Some of the surprises are founded on the scholarship

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wonder how suited to the popular taste *Phoenissae* could be made to be in production. Standing the test of time has proved to be no chronologically numeric standard. *Phoenissae* in its day (not to say millennium) certainly stood the test of time better than *The Great Gatsby*, for example, and many another "classic in its own time." But our canon is so much more high brow and the poorer for it than the ancients' who were without question interested in a good story and good politics, seasoned with good and memorable phrases, not to our taste but very much to their own. Whereas the canon of the two or three most commonly read plays of Sophocles and Aeschylus (or of Sophocles and Aeschylus combined) has remained fairly stable in the past half century, that of the chameleon Euripides changes constantly. In this Euripides has fared better than his eminent colleagues: at least he seems more alive to the canon-makers/breakers and to everyday readers. *Phoenissae* is nevertheless hard to take for those of us who have been subjected to the Aristotelian standard and to the twentieth century need for efficiency, both otherwise and aesthetic.

[5] Which must account for its place in the Byzantine triad.

[6] No one has done more in this quarter century than Marilyn B. Arthur (in her fine article, "The Curse of Civilization: The Choral Odes of the *Phoenissae*," *HSCP* 81 [1977]:163–185) to rescue the play not only from its obscurity but from less merited oblivion and to remove the opprobrium of diminished poetic capacity from its author and its odes.

[7] See *Scholia* (Schwartz), ΥΠΟΘΕΣΙΣ ΦΟΙΝΙΣΣΩΝ, 242–3 and Craik, 58–9 and for a very similar view of the play, Baldry (1956):36. Webster, too (1966):94 comments on the great "elaboration of incident" in the play. See also Michelini (1987):98 on "the impressive increase in complexity", Burian (1981):4 on the "overfull and episodic construction" as a "deliberate and crucial part of Euripides' dramatic strategy."

[8] Unless we should say that the first surprise is the title of the play itself. See Craik's excellent introduction (1988):41 and her introductions to the sections of the play.

[9] Unless the disposal of the corpses is already under way as the two make their halting way off.

of the author, as if Euripides wanted to fill in details left out by his predecessors.[10] And as must happen the legend takes over and even goes beyond itself. Stories are stronger than the men and women who tell them. And their violent glamour, as often in Euripides, entices the young and innocent to take part.

The play is also a last reunion and final disposal of many of our favorite Theban characters: accompanying the surprises are familiar people, places, ideas. Having them all there for one last time must have been gratifying to the audience. For once, the two brothers actually face each other on stage, with initial sympathy built for the younger exiled but invading Polynices, before their common mutual offstage slaughter, not once but twice breaking their mother's heart within the tragic day. She tries to reconcile them, but instead dies holding them together in her arms upon their dying breaths. For once Jocasta, though it is true that her motherliness is stressed more here than elsewhere, is given a worthy part and an eloquent, not to mention politically correct (for contemporary Athens), speech. She is allowed to be more than one thing. Of course she is the loving, protective, nurturing mother, but she is also a practical and patriotic, socially responsible, woman and, if not depicted as an original thinker,[11] at least given to reflection on the political philosophies of her time and circumstances (in the anachronistic presentation of Euripides). And all the time, while these living, bodied masks (disembodied to make way for other characters) are on stage making their play for reason or rule, for love or power or peace, behind the *skene* an imaginary Oedipus lurks, an unseen blind man in the dark, waiting to come out, awaited with dread at what he may have become in his interim isolation and ill-treatment. His sightless spirit, like a shade in the dark world hovering between being and non-being, is also like the dead dragon of Ares in its dark den, forgotten and unseen, dead but living on in spirit to curse the young and return them to the earth. And perhaps we may say that this literary monster that binds the present to the past is like the story itself, needing to be

[10] Who, for example, is/are Creon's other son(s)? Which daughter is older, Antigone or Ismene? Why can the disagreement between the brothers not be reconciled? Although Euripides goes out of his way to give us some of the information overlooked by others, even he has given us neither a future (nor a life at all) nor a tragic end for Ismene and he seems to have left Antigone with too much to do.

[11] Original, philosophical or political, thought is not something we look for on the tragic stage (any more).

told and retold, never finished but always requiring more fodder to keep it fresh.

We have to have expectations of some kind (literary, generic, historical, factual, narratological) in order to be surprised when watching a traditional story. Certainly famous scenes in literature are reactivated and changed and even quite deliberately distorted:[12] if we do not recognize this as a characteristic of Greek literature we miss much of the intellectual enjoyment of it. The final exit of Oedipus from his palace in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was doubtless a nightmarishly memorable scene which may even have earned Sophocles one of his rare second prizes. Nothing so dramatic here can vie with the horror of the newly blinded Oedipus (or of the blinded, bestial Polymestor in the *Hecabe*), but we meet a ghostly, cranky, and yet eerily dignified Oedipus who is a precursor to the dying Attic immigrant Oedipus of Sophocles.[13]

2. *Lurid Light: Prologue*

The Prologue and Play at a Glance: Old Friends and Surprises

Even as the surprises begin at once, the many themes,[14] as is usual in tragic prologues of whatever type and authorship, are initiated in the opening monologue and reenacted, with variations that will be reinforced and varied again in the dialogue that follows it. For the narrative here, as is generally true of Euripidean narrative prologues, is by no means a simple statement of facts.[15] Even indisputable facts are carefully edited to fix the speaker's point of view firmly in the audience's understanding. Everything is colored from the start by Jocasta's perspective: what she chooses to tell and what leave out, where she chooses to give a little more or less detail.[16] Some of her

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[12] See most recently, Thalmann, 1993, *passim*. Cf. Said (1985), *passim*.

[13] He in turn may be the older poet's tribute to Euripides, more laudatory, more personal, and meaningful than a chorus dressed in mourning.

[14] Serious contributions on the *Phoenissae*'s themes include Podlecki (1962), Conacher (1967), Rawson (1970), Arthur (1977), Foley (1985), Mueller-Goldingen (1985), Goff (1988).

[15] See, recently, Segal's thoughtful piece, "Tragic beginnings: narration, voice, and authority in the prologues of Greek drama," *YCS* 29 (1992):85–112, especially 87, 94.

[16] As Foley says (1985):112 "A late Euripidean play can be as important for the play that it is not as for the one that it is . . ."

omissions are filled in by Antigone and the servant in the *teichoscopia*.[17]

The atmosphere as in the *Seven against Thebes* is that of a claustrophobic city under siege, broken here by the more spacious interlude on the rooftop and later by the scenes beyond the walls in the first messenger's speech and especially in the second. The towers and walls are prominent here as they are in other Theban plays, given emphasis as surrounding circles in the repeated references throughout to rings, crowns, and enclosures and in the complex, expanding and contracting, circlings of the plot with its shifting centers from palace to plain to dragon's lair; from the descendants of Cadmus to the Sown Men's progeny, linked to each other in Jocasta's words and her children's genealogy. The walls and seven gates not only form the most prominent features of the city, they symbolize in a kind of iconic shorthand its permanence, its might, and its past and they offer a false security, enclosing not only the brothers as they grow to an inimical and treasonous manhood and even confining them together for one long episode in the play before they go their separate ways, to meet and to die, but hiding as well deeper and deeper hostilities and violent deaths that go back to the founding of the city, all the way back to the monster that inhabited the land for eons before the coming of men with their peculiarly sanguinary civilizing ways. Neither the place nor its people can be tamed.

The walls are, further, fitted out with bolts, making them secure, maybe, but still not keeping out the enemy or protecting the family of Cadmus and their kin. Both Antigone and Polynices speak of the bolts (Antigone, 115: κλῄθροις; Polynices, 261: κλῇθρα) in the gates, in successive scenes, but the difference in *ethos* is staggering. The circumstances differ too: Antigone watches the army draw up into formations with unaffected fascination. Until she sees and, helped by memory and glistening metal armor, forms an image of her brother, the shot bolts are a sign of safety, childishly simple, but meaningful.

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[17] See Goff (1988) p. 144, "the single narrative of Jocasta's prologue is followed by a dialogue between Antigone and the Pedagogue that incidentally builds up, by referring to features of the Theban plain, a history alternative to that which Jocasta delivered and one moreover in which two very different brothers, Amphion and Zethus, collaborate in founding a city rather than in destroying it." The fact that there are two speakers here, of course, at once changes the perspective, one an old slave, very certain of the proprieties, the other a young girl, more certain of her love for her heroic brother in armor than anything else. The irony of the other set of brothers is lost on her. Jocasta's history was single-minded and singularly dynastic. Real history is not like that.

Then she longs to overcome all restraint, whether made by the hands of artisans or the laws of nature, and fly to her brother (163–7). The protecting walls are for a moment gone, not even a hindrance, not even there any more in her flying fancy. For Polynices the locked gates—like nearly everything else in his life—are ambivalent. They have just been opened to let him in, but for the most part they are there to keep him (like other enemies) out, a circle of stone against his own army's circle of bronze and iron. If the diplomatic mission fails, as it must,[18] the gates will be locked forever against him unless he can breach them by force of arms. To him the question is practical: he has been allowed to pass through the gates inside the walls. Antigone's question about the bolts is at the same time more urgent and richer in family memory, as she describes the "bronze wrapped bolts" (114) in Amphion's stone structure.[19] It is just the wall and locked gates to Polynices, but it must be his. Antigone adds a person from the Theban past and with him hints at the story of the building of the wall.

Cadmus the founding forefather is mentioned again and again throughout the play: his advent, his triumph, his progeny, the citizens called by his name. The difficulties he overcame turn into failures to be visited on later generations: he founded the city but the city is in danger from his own descendants. The mother of his last descendants calls his coming to Thebes a black day for the city. He killed the dragon with Athena's guidance, but Ares demands blood for that dragon's death. It is a cliché, of course, that every victory is someone's defeat. But here there is defeat not only for the losers, but for the winners, until the final incestuous battle of the two brothers—who eye each other like lovers, each looking for a vulnerable spot in the other's flesh to penetrate—brings home the truth that there can not even be an illusion of victory when brother fights brother to the death.[20] And yet even that certainty is made ambiguous when the Thebans do gain a decisive victory by slaughtering their enemies in a tricky maneuver that confirms the truth that citizens really fight not for glory or honor so much as for survival.[21] The war—even one

[18] For its purpose is to show us the legend maintaining its hold despite new details.

[19] Cf. 824 and Craik's note *ad loc.*

[20] Their final battle turns out, surprisingly, to be the penultimate battle of the war. In the last battle there is at least the illusion of victory for the Thebans.

[21] There is little in tragedy about the "lived lives" of men and women. This may be one of the rare "reality bites."

with such famous mythological personages as the War of the Seven against Thebes—is (surprisingly) not won by the duel of the sons of Oedipus nor even by the heroic self-sacrifice of the boy Menoeceus, but by the tactics and perseverance of ordinary men without names and without genuine epic counterparts. No one of the participants wins the prize this time: a city that is ungovernable by the men who desire it. Creon is left to claim a prize he had never wanted or expected. He did not claim it when his brother-in-law, Laius, died, but he took a role for himself as *kurios* of the queen in awarding her and the kingdom to Oedipus. Now he seems to be little more than regent for Haimon to whom Antigone would bring the city as her dowry, not on the occasion of their marriage, but when Creon retires (1586–8).

Most of the time in this version of the Theban story, the actual citizens are not given prominence or are conspicuous primarily by their absence as at the opening of the rooftop scene, when they are sought but not found. It is true that the citizen army does have a few lines devoted to it, but mostly (until the final battle) the *walls* are the city, those massive structures, and within them the ruling family, a mythical polluted family whose presence overshadows anything else in Thebes and which is finally wiped away through death and exile, falling in upon itself and then forced outward in a series of pathetic parades into the abyss of extra-dramatic activity. Its Theban existence ceases to be, but the history remains, the suffering, the story. The Thebes that is left is unbreached, but also almost unrecognizable, a city of nameless people, not the domain of the Cadmean dynasty, no longer the figment of princely and poetic imagination. It has become the city of Creon, a man saddened, but not devastated; a man who does not rise to mythic or mythological proportions, who remains just what his name implies, the regent, the professional king, any king, who never reaches the stature it takes to deserve a real name, that amounts to more than a Homeric epithet. His very professionalism, moderation, and competence in his scene with Eteocles rob him of tragic stature. In his final scene, when (if) he exiles Oedipus and forbids the burial of the remains of Polynices, he is less harsh and more compromising, even apologetic, to his brother-in-law and niece of famous name, than his Sophoclean namesake, leaving Antigone's inchoate and unsure defiance in a vacuum.[22] With his

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[22] If any of this happens. See recently Willink (1990), *passim* and a century ago,

son he is what Sophocles did not let him be until the older poet had squeezed the sap from his protagonist and the regent had tried to do the same to his son. Euripides' Creon is a man who, in his one moment of tragic choice between city and family, shows his love for his family more than his country, more than his power or any power that might come to him; a man who, ironically, through his utter lack of patriotic ambition, might almost give some credibility to his Sophoclean namesake and to Eteocles, who has some positive qualities of his own. Most of all Thebes becomes the city of its people who reclaim it after their rival kings are dead.[23] Jocasta lying there, a bridge embracing her sons, now equated in death, is appealed to by her daughter (1665). But the earlier materfamilial plea for equality, though not forgotten by the audience, is ignored by Creon in his senseless new vindictiveness and superficial patriotism.

Along with the beginnings of things in her first speech Jocasta emphasizes the *naming* of persons and things. She lists the names of the generations of Theban kings from Cadmus to Laius, all named, we may assume, in the usual way by their fathers and unnamed mothers when they were acknowledged as members of the *oikos*. Her own name, her brother's, the names of her children follow. Only Oedipus was named, not by his parents, but by Hellas: named for the deformity his father gave him, and this is tragic enough, but of equal importance the fact that Hellas named him hints that all Greeks know his name; but (we must say to ourselves), his name is not known primarily because of his pedal deformity, but for his breaking the parental-filial taboos. His father had refused to acknowledge him; his mother could not protect her firstborn son, but he paid back unwittingly the price of their non-rearing of him. The famous walls, then, protect the city only from her truly external human foes, the foreign army at the gates. Inside they enclose the family that should protect the city and all the families of Thebes, but in fact puts them in danger. The security of the walls, the details of their bolts[24] are mentioned by Antigone and the old man and by the fugitive Polynices.

Verrall (1895), esp. 235–7, 242. But see Mastronarde (1994) in his notes on the authenticity of the various scenes throughout his commentary, for a more reasonable approach to this text.

[23] Such citizen-soldiers, like the less egalitarian of the Athenians, might briefly support a Creon who makes a distinction between the brothers' corpses, once the influence of the family of Cadmus to Polydorus to Labdacus to Laius is gone.

[24] On the meaning of ἔμβολα (114), see Diggle (1989).

But no walls can protect a city from an Oedipus, brutalized by his father, begotten and born to suffer and die and first of all to avenge his begetting. No walls kept away the Sphinx, "earth's brood that eats men up," nor the misbegotten brood of the incestuous union, nor the ravenous hatred of the male members of this all too well-known family for each other.

The characters in the play who have names are well known to us (with the likely exception of Menoeceus, grandson of the man whose name is known to us from Sophocles as Creon's father), but Euripides (as the scholiasts and generations of subtle critics remark) was fond of showing off his erudition and no less so his invention:[25] novelty for its own sake was a familiar critical term of opprobrium in an age less sympathetic to Euripides. No classical play is more full of surprises than the *Phoenissae* with its twists and turns, towers and dens. The surprises concern people and events we know from other Theban plays and from the *Phoenissae* itself. Even the name of the play might lead us to suspect that this is a different Theban play, from the early history of the town, or not even a *Theban* play at all.[26]

The name of the play itself and the chorus for which it is named are, to be sure, part of the emphasis on origins. The journey of Cadmus leads to the founding of Thebes. It is a journey from the distant past (from the traditional beginning of many things Hellenic, including the art of writing), travelled again in the near past by the chorus. The emigrant chorus will witness, not the destruction of Thebes, but the end of Cadmus' line. The play is full of exiles' journeys. Cadmus' loss of his native land becomes his founding with oracular authority of the new city. Most of the other journeys are similarly destined to be without return: the chorus' as captives bound for Delphi, never again to see their native Phoenicia but destined for a happier, safer place than their present imprisonment along the vacant streets of a besieged city; Polynices' brief return within the walls no longer his; the final exile of Oedipus with his daughter that takes them not only outside of Thebes to a place closer to home, but away from the tradition as we know it from the famous *Antigone*.[27]

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[25] On innovations in the *Phoenissae* see Mastronarde (1994):25–30.

[26] See Mueller-Goldingen (1985):65, "Mit dem erster Vers nennt der Chor in deutlicher Anlehnung an den ersten Vers der Phönissen des Phrynichos den Ausgangspunkt seiner Reise."

[27] Is it a new tradition created here of a filial rather than sororal Antigone? Of course the whole play changes the relationships we know from other Theban sto-

Creon's abortive plan for his son would have amounted to exiling him from Thebes, turning him into a passive Polynices figure.

Adding to the pathos of the theme of the journey are two things: the exits one by one (of Polynices, Eteocles, Menoeceus, Jocasta, Oedipus and Antigone) of men and women who will never return, or who will return only carried back from the family battlefield, dead, in the arms of loved ones or by servants on litters.[28] The connection of some of the journeys of exile with coming of age adds deeper pathos: Oedipus' departure from Corinth when his first fair beard was shadowing his cheek (32), Polynices' at the same age (63), Menoeceus' before his betrothal (947), Antigone's shortly before her scheduled wedding day (or if Haemon[29] is to be deleted, certainly as a very young woman). Oedipus journeys roundabout to his doom and the devastation of his family. Polynices and Antigone go to early death and youthful exile. There is nothing worse, affirms Polynices, than to lose one's country, but in the play most people do: the chorus, Cadmus, Oedipus, Polynices, Antigone, and Oedipus for a second (or if we count his loss of the land of his youth for a third) time. Menoeceus dies to avoid such a fate: to save his city, he must lose it for himself. The pathetic reality of these losses is that the young exiles or victims know nothing more: their lives are fixed or ended before they can learn to be anything for themselves. They are victims of the tradition.

Among the old friends (which include Antigone, Oedipus, and Eteocles, changed almost beyond recognition from their pre-existences in Sophoclean and Aeschylean dramas) chief is Thebes itself. Like all mythological tragedy and Theban plays in particular, the *Phoenissae* is intimately concerned with place.[30] There are by convention no interior scenes in tragedy (and in this tragedy no *eccyclema* blurs the distinction between interior and exterior), but we are aware of the interior of the palace, of things that happened there in the past, of specific places within it: a throne room, the women's quarters,

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ries, which are primarily about men's relationships with men: father/son; brother/brother or women's sacrifices for men. In this play we have mother/sons, mother/daughter, father/daughter.

[28] See Suzanne Said (1989):125–131 for the "voyages sans retour."

[29] Mastronarde (1994) refers to Verrall's "fantastic theory that Antigone had no role" in the play (553; cf. 170) which would also exclude Haemon. On Haemon see Willink (1990):192 and Mastronarde's note (418).

[30] See Vian (1963):84 on Euripides' familiarity with the topography of Thebes and Zeitlin (1990:Thebes):*passim* on Thebes as a place of problematic relations.

and a lightless room imprisoning Oedipus from the view of others, something new here that bears investigation.[31] Offstage exteriors are both within the walls and beyond the walls: a world enclosed and a war at its gates: but all we see with our own eyes is, as always, the *skene* with the spaces in front of it. The famous sites of Thebes are given their due, in the scene from the roof, in Polynices' greeting and farewell to the haunts of his youth, and in Menoeceus' site-specific sacrificial suicide (1009–11), that brings together the founding of the city and its present in a genealogical continuum, in an obscure Euripideo-Teiresian etiology which makes clear the evanescence and elusiveness of security. Jocasta's monologue offers a more internal palace history. Antigone looks beyond the palace to the plain and the sites of monuments that hint of the stories of other Thebans, not named in Jocasta's selected genealogy.[32] Polynices' addresses to the places of his childhood and youth (the city's temples and shrines and exercise grounds) suggest a Thebes with a civic life outside the palace. Menoeceus' suicide returns him to the earth and eventually brings to power a ruler from another family of Thebans, the Sown Men. In the actual battle, the walls, the gates, the ditch command all our attention. The duel begins with Eteocles on the tower and Polynices in the ranks of the Argives. But when they join in battle, the place becomes generic (μέσον 1361). Only in the farewells of the exodos is greater specificity returned to the city and to the house.

Inside the play, between its beginning and end are more trivial and personal details, of quarrelling brothers, of strategy (not grand and simple as in *Septem*, but more realistic), of men dying and killing, and the story of a single and simple heroic youth, and surrounding that the story of a girl growing up, but not learning to be the woman she is expected to be, and surrounding her, the story of her father, the man who did to his parents the worst things imaginable, but was not defeated and who we know (though Euripides did not) was made, in a final drama that bears his name, to triumph over his own wrongdoing and the wrong done him. The woman Antigone is put together only to be torn apart by the many kinds of violence men do to women, fragmented by the war and by her family's troubles as much as the city would have been had it been sacked, torn too by Creon's authoritarianism. She cannot be one thing or another: even

[31] See Said (1989):125–6.
[32] See Goff (1988):144.

in choosing her natal family over marriage and a husband, she must choose between duties to her father and her brother. She chooses her father. She had already chosen her mother and has personally witnessed the end of her maternal heritage.

The rooftop interlude is a distinct scene, a set piece, as it were, but it is also innovative, not a movable, ready-made scene to be dusted off and inserted wherever relevant. It recalls other dramatic and epic scenes, but there is nothing else like it. Even if, as the earliest criticism says, it is not part of the drama, a drama is more than its action or what moves the action forward. This eerily beautiful scene, combining a happy naiveté with the violence and cynicism of preparations for war, is not the inspiration of a waning Muse. If it is not fully integrated into the play, the play would hardly work better without it: Antigone's presence in the palace needs to be prepared for so that she can re-enter it and exit after the first messenger's speech and return with her dead after the second messenger's speech. Throughout the play there is a certain disconnectedness of events. Act follows act, scene follows scene, but how and if they are related other than sequentially is far from clear. The many surprises in the play are in part a product of this disjointedness, of things seeming to happen out of control.[33] The references to well-known scenes and events in earlier Theban plays only heighten this disconnectedness, as does the parallelism of events established by Jocasta.[34] The only teleology is death.

The Prologue: Some Details

Jocasta's monologue (1–87): Beginnings and Endings

To our surprise this is Jocasta (as soon becomes evident, 10–12), still alive many years after the fateful discovery of her maternal relationship to her husband, in the house that Cadmus built, in control of or trying to control the outcome of her sons' rivalry, seemingly (but the seeming is, sadly, an illusion) no longer the woman whose destiny is controlled by the men in her life (men she names one by one in her monologue: father, brother, husbands, sons). She begins with

[33] Thalmann (1993):155 refers to this slackening of ties of causality, which he considers "a comment on the randomness and brutality of the world Euripides portrays." It is not such a foreign world.

[34] See Mastronarde (1994) on the parallelism:139.

particular events: two fateful days set side by side, a beginning and an ending. But every beginning is seen in the play as also an ending: the founding of Thebes was the end of Cadmus' journey and quest. The ending for so many characters, named leaders and nameless soldiers, will signal the beginning of Creon's rule, of Oedipus' exile, of Antigone's chaotic inchoate adulthood.[35]

Jocasta's first word[36] (῞Ηλιε, 3) is dramatic and uplifting, a greeting to the day. The sun rises every day and begins every day's drama, but not every sunrise is momentous, historical (in the personal, familial, or public signification). Today is the day the enemy is at the gates. Today is the day in which time is compressed to the length of a tragedy in which things more final than the ordinary repeated activities of people and nature occur. The history of Thebes for Jocasta is compressed into special days, days of passage for the members of the ruling family: Cadmus' literal passage from Phoenicia to Thebes, marriages, births, comings of age and deaths. These are the historical events that are enumerated to mark off special days from every span between sunrise and sunset. They are also everyone's historical events (passages whether geographical or ritual): some (loss, exile, and death) always tragic in the common sense, but others only tragic for tragic figures seeing themselves at fateful times. In Jocasta's mind every event she lists is tragic, fraught with consequences that make an ordinary or even happy event (like her marriage to a young hero or an older king, like the saving of her son and his adoption by the Corinthian royal family, like the founding of a great city and civilization and the births of heirs) tragic and miserable from the beginning, for later events can and often do in retrospect change the past (or create the past, for it has no existence of its own). Jocasta addresses the sun for today and relates today to another, much earlier, day dawning for Thebes, the day Cadmus came to the land. That was an **unlucky** day for Thebes. The birth of Thebes is thus like the birth of a human being (that of the riddled Oedipus specifically). At the end of the play this day is done and the man of night ventures forth to touch his dead, also shrouded in darkness. The end is night and the faltering departure of the last of Cadmus' children.

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[35] Whether or not Haemon is excised from the play (which solves a lot, see Willink [1990]:192) Antigone and her father form the dramatic couple at the end.

[36] Lines 1–2 are omitted or suspected by most critics. See Haslam (1975). The timing is established as the break of day. The simple address to the sun is so much more effective than the baroque periphrasis of lines 1–2.

As events have turned out for her and her family, Jocasta has the right to deplore the day Cadmus came. His heirs and the descendants of the Sown Men are to suffer annihilation or worse. But still the city stands and today's events can be seen, as almost always, with that ambivalence artistic distancing and seriousness can give to real events or to events that are real for the fictitious characters experiencing them with whom we have a special relationship because we pass time with them, because we share the time of their present sufferings.

The play begins and ends with recountings of the past and what must include revisions of past emotions, the second more sad even than the first because Jocasta of the prologue still has one last hope for her children and Oedipus at the play's end understands that he never had any hope; that even his youth in the home of Polybus was not what it seemed, the youth of a loved legitimate child, but of a stranger used to serve as the child never born, even, he says (with a sensitivity we hardly expect the ancients to be capable of), of a slave in the house of a master. The choral odes go over the same past and extend the tragedy beyond the mundane to the mythical and beyond the royal family's losses to other sons and other mothers and other daughters, in a typical Homeric and Euripidean equalizing of men and women of whatever rank through the aesthetic of suffering, loss, and death. The relation of the **beginning** and the **end** gives a kind of wholeness[37] to the (very large) slice of the Theban story that is presented here. The beginning and end are (as usual in serious Greek literature) seen together. Jocasta does not start just anywhere: she starts at the beginning; but as often there can be an even earlier beginning. In this drama those earlier beginnings are in the Phoenician origins recalled by the chorus and in the pre-history of the land implied by Teiresias. Jocasta's beginning is the end of Cadmus' journey and search. The chorus, in repeating—both in word and through their own immediately past journey—Cadmus' travels (though they are en route to another, better place), will return us to the beginning in another way. The Phoenician women represent a second, feminine, point of view. Thebes itself through its relations with the east and its proximity to Delphi becomes part of something larger, a grander

[37] If this feeling of wholeness is artificial and even false in that real life rarely achieves that kind of aesthetic finitude, it is still very Greek. The ending of the play, while achieving for Oedipus a sense of an ending, breaks down in what resembles the chaos of lived life.

sweep of time and place and yet is also limited politically and cosmically, as compared to the more ancient civilization and the enduring religious site which are not in danger of self-destruction.[38]

Even Jocasta, one of the least selfish members of this supremely egoistic family, sees the fortunes of Thebes as equivalent to the fortunes of the house of Cadmus; the nearly simultaneous founding of the city, the founding of the line, and the sowing of the citizens doubtless encourage this equation. But it is also common in Theban plays, for whatever reason, for characters, men especially, to fail to make satisfactory distinctions between οἶκος and πόλις.[39]

Like Medea's Nurse,[40] Jocasta is wishing away the first cause but in this case the first cause is the very **foundation**, the existence of Thebes as a city and of the race of Cadmeans and Sown Men (joined at the marriage of Jocasta and Laius), not that the nameless citizens[41] get much mention.[42] The chorus does take in others' losses in one ode, but even there the connection of the ode to the play is the death of Menoeceus, who stands for all the young men devoured by the Sphinx and by the insatiable god of war, and the story of Oedipus' victory between his two shocking disasters. Even those disasters at first seemed like lucky events to the prize-winner.[43]

At the end Antigone uses the story of the daughters of Danaus to

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[38] Its wall and rivers, even its altars and holy places do not inspire the awe of the sacred grandeur of Delphi, a place set in opposition to Thebes through details of shared characteristics in the first choral ode, but its myths of murder, incest, and mayhem make it as memorable and hotter and more human.

[39] In this play the destiny of the brothers is, as Said points out (1985:513–14) separated from the destiny of the city itself. But this fact makes their criminal disregard of the well-being of both city and family all the more apparent.

[40] Cf. Pucci (1980):Chapter 1 esp. 32; Segal (1992):94.

[41] This is not so unusual, perhaps, but other Theban plays, including *Bacchae* and *Suppliants*, are more practically political than this one which includes a fair amount of political theorizing, but shows little of the relation of the citizen to the state and the ruling party or family. The chorus' foreignness adds to the isolation and alienation of the royal family from the citizens.

[42] Alone of extant Theban plays set in Thebes, the *Phoenissae*'s cast of characters, chorus, and supernumeraries includes no citizens who are not connected to one or another of the members of the royal family. The existence of citizens is implicit, but hardly crucial to the main story line, possibly because we know the brothers will kill each other and that the walls will not be breached. Whatever the explanation, there is no building up of interest in or fear for the non-royal people who live inside the walls and towers. This is saved for one episode and the following ode at the center of the play.

[43] Oedipus won his wife as a prize, but Euripides also makes his killing of his father almost like a contest with a prize, which he takes to his (step-) father. He was easily diverted from his mission.

firmly adhere to her father and to reject her cousin, making the recently bereaved Creon cringe. The threat, coming from this Antigone, addressed to this Creon, seems more literary-historical than genuine.[44] Antigone's refusal to marry and Creon's acceptance of her refusal mark with finality the end of the family whose tree Jocasta had given earlier to set the scene and to set the play on its course (and so they do fit in with the play's movement to a conclusion, to a final suicide of the family within the confinements of this closed Thebes).

Jocasta gives the familiar genealogy, but with some disturbing omissions and additions. Harmonia, wife of Cadmus, is called the child only of her mother Aphrodite (though Jocasta mentions no other wives or mothers by name in her human stemma until she comes to her own marriage and maternity), but Ares' *fatherhood* is no less relevant than his hostility to the race to whom he became doubly connected when Jocasta (a full-blooded daughter of the Sown Men) married Laius. Thus her addition of her own familial relationships is not irrelevant: here she connects the two families that will be prominent in the play and names the man (Creon) who will be the continuation of Thebes and whose son's death ironically guarantees at one mythological level that there will be a political continuation. Jocasta is the link between the descendants of Cadmus and of the dragon. The sibling relationship is also prominent in the play[45] and should not be forgotten in the chaos of the ending when Antigone is forced to choose between her duty to her brother and her duty to her father/brother.

"They call me Jocasta" (12) means no more than "my name is Jocasta," though perhaps it adds the notion that her name is well-known.[46] Right after she mentions her father's giving her a name,

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[44] And for that very reason among others it is suspected of being by a later hand, that of an actor/producer who wanted to get the play into line with the expected literary, mythological tradition.

[45] See Craik *ad* 11 and 986.

[46] Naming is a prominent theme in the *Phoenissae* (see Craik's notes *ad* 27, 55–8, 412, 499–502, 636–7, 1702):

> Jocasta was named by her father. She gives the names of everyone (that is, every male) in the royal line: Cadmus > Polydorus > Labdacus > Laius. All of these men were duly named by their fathers. But her child, the child of Laius, is only παῖς, τέκνον, ὁ φύς, βρέφος until Hellas names him. For to name him would be to acknowledge him as a member of the family.
>
> Oedipus is definitely not named by his father or mother. In fact Jocasta specifically mentions that Greece named him, because of his old injury, inflicted by his father.
>
> The naming of Ismene and Antigone was done by their father and mother respectively.

she tells of her marriage to Laius, a marriage arranged, doubtless, by the elder Menoeceus (whose name becomes significant for the present drama through his namesake and grandson) and Labdacus or Laius. Nothing is said about their life together, but she does refer to him over and over as her husband.[47] Jocasta comes to be seen and sees herself as first and foremost a mother in this play, a Jocasta very different from that of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, whose relevant relationships are shown to be with two adults, her husband (who, though also her son, is still very much an adult) and her brother.[48]

The orderly succession from father to son will be matched by contrasts throughout the play and finally by the destruction of the family, disorder of relationships, chaos of choices and actions at the end. Laius is sterile. The whole family is about to break down. He is unable to beget children until after he visits the oracle.[49] This a

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The naming of Polynices (*nomen-omen*) and of Eteocles: Polynices is mentioned in Jocasta's monologue through a periphrasis, using an element from Eteocles' name to describe Polynices, but even the circumlocution does not hide the etymology of his name. Perhaps it does show a greater similarity between the brothers who may start out being two Eteocleis but end up becoming two Polyniceis (as in Aeschylus (*Septem* 832; cf. 658 ἐπωνύμῳ . . . Πολυνείκει, echoed in κατ' επωνυμίαν . . . πολυνεικεῖς).

[47] This is not unusual: married life is not (*pace* Edward Albee) perceived as dramatic until a crisis is reached. On the other hand, we can say something about couples in some plays: we are shown the stormy relationship of Jason and Medea, vying with each other for a place in heroic tradition; the conciliatory stance of Jocasta to Oedipus in *OT*; the competition for dominance between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon; frequent marital absence, as of Theseus and Heracles in the *Hippolytus* and *Heracles*, and a scene from family life in the latter play, to name but a few. Of Jocasta and Laius we know nothing except the crisis, his improvidential terror and cruelty are part of that first crisis, another tragedy, already treated. Their life together is not reviewed at the crisis. Married life is not a blessed estate in the Thebes of the play's generation: witness Jocasta's first and second marriages; Creon's marriage that ends in the early death of his wife; Polynices' marriage abroad that brought misery to his mother and to the very land and its waters; Antigone's imminent wedding that she threatens to turn into murder. See Goff 140–1.

[48] How did she learn of the oracle which she tells in detail? Possibly at Laius' return, possibly when he snatches away her child as he remembers the oracle's words ending with the portentous and more persuasive "the whole house will wade through blood." Laius himself would not need any persuading beyond the first clause.

[49] The exact words of the oracle to Laius are given in full. Laius has asked only for male children. He is told (18–21):

> O king of Thebes of the fine horses, do not sow a furrow of children against the will of the gods. For if you shall beget a child, he who is born will kill you and all your house will walk in blood.

A comparison of oracles in the three extant plays that treat—however obliquely and after the fact—the begetting and birth of Oedipus may be illuminating. In Aeschylus the oracle, thrice repeated, ("die without issue and save the city" *Septem* 746–9) is political in the apodosis from the start; in Sophocles, it is only personal and not

nice irony: he is protected whether by chance, natural infertility, or divine beneficence until he knows the consequences: the question of the guilt/innocence of Oedipus so prominent in the *OT* is transferred back one generation.

In the begetting of Oedipus, Laius does not forget the oracle, but he disobeys it under the almost irresistible double pressure of libido and intoxication (21). There is Bacchus behind it, whether wine is the cause or a Dionysiac frenzy. Laius becomes a father: the juxtaposition of πατὴρ and γνούς, the interposition of πατήρ between σπείρας and γνούς (22–3) tell the whole tragic story. He had his pleasure, became a father, and then he both realized his error and remembered the prophecy. He tries to undo his act, knowing it was wrong and dangerous; he tries to be not a father, but he is, whether he acknowledges the son or not. Laius has a more personal part than in other surviving drama on the subject and a more cruel one. Before giving the baby to herdsmen, he himself bores spikes into the newborn ankles. This is the cause of the naming of Oedipus: "Hellas named him" (27). Is this said by Jocasta in a tone of regret and disapproval, with bitterness at the fate Laius forced upon her and their son? Her own father had named her. Of course Oedipus was not named: naming would make him part of the family, "son of Laius," dreaded words. His name, when it is given him by the world at large, by someone who spoke Greek, and generally accepted because it describes a physical condition, is a reproach to his father. Jocasta is innocent. She is, in every aspect of her life, at the whim of the men, her father, Laius, her brother and her sons/son's sons. Even the most intimate scenes of mother and child are denied her and given to another woman. Oedipus, unnamed, son of no one, is (so far) innocent too.

More maternal aspects of Jocasta appear as she gives the details of

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conditional ("you will die by your son's hand" *OT* 710–14; cf. 720–2, 787–93: once again the oracle is repeated three times, this time in the play itself), though the play is essentially political, beginning as it does with the suppliant scene; in Euripides it is personal and conditional and so not inevitable: it extends to the whole family, but not the city, although the city is at stake on two occasions (from the ravages of the Sphinx when there was no ruler and in the attack by the Seven, when there is one ruler too many). The oracle says nothing about the incest and it refers only to the king and his house. Not even Apollo cared enough to mention the incest. Οἶκος/πολις is a theme in all the plays about the house of Laius. It is a family which seems unable to make the right distinctions (whether political, personal, or cosmic) and often (as in *Antigone*) the distinctions they make are wrongly applied: Creon especially makes wrong distinctions between or crazy decisions based on his ideas about youth/age; male/female; friend/enemy; living/dead.

the adoption.[50] Even after so many years and after the births and growing up of four additional children, she thinks of that lost baby as her child (30, 33; cf. 44, 50, 54, 55).

The childhood and adolescence of Oedipus are of course skipped, as being undramatic, unknown, and irrelevant. He grows from infant at the breast of his foster mother to adolescent with the first down of young manhood (which to the ancient Greeks was perceived as reddish in color and recognized as an important time of passage to adulthood).[51] Somehow (and the randomness is stressed) Oedipus figures out or finds out from someone that his parents are not his parents just as he is coming of age and he sets out to the oracle. And Laius went to the oracle to find out about the exposed child. Surely there is a hint of bitterness in the words "my child" . . . "my husband" that begin line 33 and end line 35. The common destination, the temple of Phoebus, unites the two men and the two clauses. It is a coincidence, but even so the two men are united in purpose as in direction, to find out about each other.

The fact that they "joined step" (Craik's translation of ξυνάπτετον πόδα, 37) means that they were both still going toward the oracle. They did not meet, but continued in the same direction. Oedipus is ordered off the road, but he does not yield. Instead, "thinking big" (μέγα φρονῶν, like Hippolytus, *Hipp.* 6, and the νέοι of Aristotle's Rhetoric 2, 1389a) the young Oedipus continues along, without responding to Laius' charioteer. The horses run over him, bloodying his already brutalized ankles. That is enough, the son kills the father as foretold. Jocasta adds no other details. Taking the point of view of each in turn (40, 41), she does give the motivation of each man, the feelings of pride (royal and youthful) and the violent reactions of father to son and of son to father. It is not an accident, but like his father, Oedipus yields to an almost irresistible temptation. To respond in kind to pain, insult, and attack is not ungreek; rather to fail to do so would be culturally unexpected. This is also a masculine adventure story: two men on the road battle for precedence (as Polynices will recount a fight for preference when he meets Tydeus at Adrastus' halls).

He takes the horses back to Polybus (45). This is hardly an irrel-

[50] Cf. her conciliatory nature in *OT*, but that is about as far as it goes, and is perhaps a womanly as much as a maternal role.

[51] Though they are not as interconnected as they are in *OT*.

evant detail. It indicates beyond any doubt that Oedipus had no reason to fear returning to Corinth and his foster parents, because he never heard the oracle.[52] Taking the team to Polybus is an act of filial piety (the first thing Oedipus does after committing patricide). Nor was his homecoming an integral part of the same action, connected to his leaving his foster home and going to the oracle as it so clearly and compellingly is in Sophocles. His coming back to Thebes and solving the riddle was just by chance or for the sport or the prize, which had been heralded abroad. The events are connected because Jocasta has been widowed and Creon has offered the kingdom and Jocasta's hand in marriage as a prize for defeating the Sphinx, a misuse of his authority as her *kurios* in that he does not take into account the suitability of the match.[53] There may be a stronger link on the divine level, but if so it is less than clear. This is not a play about Oedipus' fate and his involvement in it or his coming to know that he has been living it. Laius bears more of the blame: he knowingly disobeys an oracle; twice he bloodies his son's feet (26, 42). He is the one who meets his fate as he is trying to avoid it. He is the one who knows his own fate and acts to undo it with violence at every step. But Laius is only a one-dimensional brute, hardly tragic. Euripides adds the detail that Laius was going to the oracle and for what reason when he was killed.[54]

Jocasta now comes to what is for her the crux, the real past *kairos*. This is where she comes in and where all her carefully built connections come together, brought together by the Sphinx.[55]

My husband was gone (46).

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[52] As Craik points out *ad loc.*: "Euripides implies that the two separate paths of Oidipous and Laios came together, meeting a third road which led to Delphi, the destination of both, reached by neither." What does this have to do with the innocence or guilt of Oedipus? If he never heard the oracle, he was never able to avoid it, as Laius was, even being fortuitously sterile before he received the oracular response.

[53] Adrastus makes the same mistake when he gives his daughters to two men based on their similarity to animals, for surely there is no question but that those two Argive couplings are among the play's failed marriages. Of course such mistakes are common in folk tales. Creon, however, is presented as a modern man, a pragmatist, not much given to projecting himself into myth or story.

[54] Euripides also adds the detail that Antigone is the elder and who named each of the girls, and which of the brothers is older as if he is intentionally filling in details the other poets left out or left ambiguous.

[55] It will only be later, in the second stasimon (806–811) and especially in the mourning for Menoeceus the younger, that we will feel more acutely the ravages of the Sphinx, reliving the mourning of mothers and sisters.

My brother Creon (47) . . .
Oedipus succeeds with the Sphinx: "somehow, he happened to get it" (τυγχάνει δέ πως, 49). The order of the words in line 50 shows Oedipus entrapped by the songs of the Sphinx, but he solves them and breaks out with the final word μαθών. The stress is on chance and ignorance. Both are ignorant, mother and son, husband and wife (53–4).[56] To her son she bears the usual post-epic four children, duly named by their parents.[57]

Oedipus learns about his sharing of his mother's bed: how he learns is left obscure. That was the drama of another Oedipus. There is more piercing:[58] the pain of knowledge again leads to self-inflicted blindness (φόνος, 61). He tries to hide himself, to hide from himself and from the gaze of others. The self that he created in this way emerges at the end of the play to touch the bodies of those he cannot see, but whose lives he has destroyed, who were repelled by his self-mutilation and the shame of their begetting, but most of all could not bear to look into those hollow, blindly staring eyes, both reproachful and kindred.

Innocence and knowledge are prominent themes in the Sophoclean version: this Oedipus is innocent (up to the self-blinding).[59] He has been set up by circumstances. Laius knows what the oracle means but disobeys; then he realizes his mistake (23). Merope consciously

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[56] That Jocasta is alive to tell this story is the surprise. But like Oedipus in this version, she is innocent. Everything that has happened to her was done through the machinations of men: her father named her and gave her in marriage; her husband impregnated her and gave the labor of her womb to shepherds to expose; her brother gave her as a prize to her own son.

[57] Two males, Eteocles and Polynices (the latter first named periphrastically, 56 as he is in *Septem* 577, 641) and two daughters, Ismene, named by her father and Antigone the elder, named by her mother. The children are named according to oppositions they represent: Ismene, a local Theban name (a feminine of Ismenos, one of the nurturing river gods); Antigone, somehow an opposite, an opponent of generation; Eteocles, named to true glory; Polynices, full of strife, his opponent in glorious might: both sons are full of strife, neither more glorious than the other.

[58] There is a lot of pain and piercing and blood in the prologue as there is also in the play. Oedipus' feet are twice bloodied (with iron and with the hooves of horses). His eyes are pierced by the golden πόρπαι and by his own hand (Jocasta calls it a murder) in a gesture that will imprison him forever in himself. Menoeceus, the last of the sown men, will stab his own throat in a gesture of freedom for himself and deliverance for his city. At the end the brothers will pierce each other's internal organs and Jocasta will be pierced by her son's sword in her own hand. And that is Euripides' end of the story of this family in the political life of Thebes.

[59] Jocasta uses the violent word φόνος (61) to characterize it. Later Oedipus himself can only understand his assault on his eyes and his children's lives as divinely inspired (1612–14, οὐ . . . ἄνευ θεῶν).

deceives her husband (30–1). In three μαθώνs (33–4, 50, 59) Oedipus' whole career is summed up! All of them lack the crucial detail of how he found out.[60]

The Euripidean Oedipus—unseen and unseeing for most of the play unlike the active, intense, searching, intellectual Sophoclean protagonist—just happens to learn. The chance learning is a factor at every step, first about his parentage, then the riddle of the Sphinx, and finally what is so crucial, exciting, absolutely revolting and attractive in Sophocles, who he is and what he has done (which achieve a oneness in Sophocles' blinded Oedipus). About all this Euripides' Jocasta is silent: her Oedipus returns home to Corinth without getting an answer to the question for which he journeyed so far. The consequences are reported more fully (60–62). Not knowledge but the sad bloody outcome is the theme here.

Now it is the next generation's turn. Again childhood—not a very interesting time for the Greeks—is skipped. Life starts again when the sons become embroiled in red-bearded puberty, myth, and passions with consequences. It is a time of transition from stagnant (to the ancient mind) asexual childhood and therefore much more interesting from a tragic point of view. Like their grandfather and their father-brother they try to blot out knowledge. A blind man was hidden in the dark, locked up somewhere in the palace. But a blind man is already enclosed in darkness. Now comes the real surprise (66). Jocasta starts her line with ζῶν: Oedipus is living in the halls.

Being sick (νοσῶν, 66 cf. 877, 867; 472, 1014, 1097, 1171), Oedipus curses the sons that they will divide not the land, the city, or the kingdom, but the **house** with whetted iron (cf. *Septem*, where Eteocles himself is the iron, τεθηγμένον "whetted" 715; *Phoenissae* θηκτῷ σιδήρῳ 68), revealing at last his congenitally violent feelings toward his kin. Oedipus is closed up (a prisoner or a monster?) and we wait to see him. The aged pair do not meet during the play's time, though they

[60] Laius has the surest knowledge and he lets pleasure and wine overpower it. Then he knows that he has made a terrible mistake and he tries to rectify it in a criminal way, cruelly, foolishly and crudely. His belief in the oracle proves his downfall, but selfishly he is less worried about the second part of the god's message: the whole family will walk through blood. Even after his crude attempt to get rid of the unwanted boy, he knows that the oracle is always right and frets himself to death. Is this a subtle comment on Sophocles *OT* as a play about knowledge? In so far as knowledge is a theme in the play, it is presented pessimistically. The value of knowledge is negative because knowledge and the search for it lead to destructive actions and language.

show compassion for each other (60, 1088–9, 1566, 1609). Oedipus, a passive sightless old man, suffering nearly total deprivation of the senses, will once again confront his wife's dead body (as he had done in Sophocles' version). Sophocles' Oedipus, once the man of light and sight, bursts out of the house to show himself. We wait to see what new horror Euripides has in store: all the unseen terrors of the offstage interior space are placed in him, in his ruined person and his memories of pain.

The sons are in accord over one thing only, the mistreatment of their father which only increases their fear of his fortune and their own. First they act together to get him out of the way and then to avoid his curses, by sharing the kingdom and not living together. This is the only time the brothers are civilized, acting unselfishly for what they see as their mutual good which are even for the good of the family and *polis*. But it does not last for long. In their common action they are united by use of the dual and plural (69–74) but then they split up into two individuals (74–6).

Jocasta has sent a "messenger" (ἄγγελος, 83) to arrange a truce. She is acting the mother and the diplomat (as she does between her brother and her husband/son in *OT*) in the political vacuum created by Oedipus' abrogation of responsibility and Eteocles' apolitical tyranny. And intertextually she is taking away Eteocles' prerogative. In *Septem* Eteocles as commander and king had sent out spies (36), one of whom reports (39) what the army is doing. In *Phoenissae* it is a household servant who reports the success of his mission to Jocasta and describes the army for Antigone and the audience rather than to Eteocles and the citizens.

Jocasta ends with a prayer, repeating her reference to the sky and light, a general reflection, but still personal. As if remembering the jars of Zeus she prays not to let the **same** mortal be unhappy forever. Who is the same?[61]

Spaces: Interiors and Exteriors in the Prologue, part 1

Jocasta enters from and returns to the house, actions which give substance to the *skene*, but primarily private significance, if we compare this space to that in *Septem* where there is no definite interior space or *OT* where the suppliants come from throughout the city,

[61] *Ad* 87, Craik suggests Jocasta herself or Oedipus. The unhappiness is shared, but finally Oedipus is the one left with only a predicted death in Athens for relief.

and Oedipus' exit from the palace to meet them gives the play an immediate political significance.[62] House and city in other Theban plays meet in the space in front of the palace: the division of the brothers' inheritance is not just of the house. The distinction between the house and the city is blurred. So far Jocasta has talked only about the ruling family. Where do the citizens of Thebes come in? Unlike Aeschylus' version, this one does not present the citizen army either as a group or as a series of individuals with their contingents, whether in word or on stage until we are told of their actions in the last part of the second messenger's speech.[63]

Despite its being οἶκος-centered,[64] the prologue ranges freely geographically, focusing on Thebes and the coming of Cadmus and the return of Polynices with his foreign army, but glancing as far away as Phoenicia, the home of Cadmus. In the nearer distance are the road to Phocis and Delphi, not named, but implied in the reference to the unhelpful oracles. The earth's navel (μεσόμφαλα 237) will continue to be prominent as the chorus' destination. Hellas named Oedipus: his fame is coextensive with the Greek-speaking world. Argos, Polynices' new home, his new οἶκος and πόλις, completes the tragic and epic landscape.[65]

The time is dawn. The prologue stresses the fact of daylight coming: dawning rays of the sun call the materfamilias out of the house to address the day and, then, in the next scene the ghostly light glancing off the weapons of the warriors on the field illuminates the imaginary offstage elsewhere for Antigone and for us.

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[62] Although there is not much internal scenery, the life together of Jocasta and Laius and of Jocasta and Oedipus is implicit as is the *skene* as the place of power, which Eteocles refuses to relinquish. The marriage of Polynices outside the house and city and his exile and return parallel the ambivalent relationship through polar oppositions of Oedipus, exposed as an infant and now imprisoned in the dark interior of the palace (one raised center of the city), to the house and land. The exiled Polynices returns and will be allowed within the city gates, all the way to the palace entrance where the negotiations will soon take place, but his way is barred beyond that public and visible space.

[63] On Eteocles in the *Septem* and the decisions regarding the seven Theban champions, see most recently, Johnson (1992):*passim*.

[64] On the geographical context and use of spaces see Said (1989) *passim*, esp. 114, 117, 125–6 and Zeitlin (1990: "Thebes"), esp. 131, 134 for the psychopolitical landscape.

[65] Only Athens is left out, but Oedipus will reach the city of asylum, where autochthony is not a danger to its continuance any more than is the immigration of tragic figures (not at least since Medea), in time to end his life. Athens, too, has suffered a recent tragedy and a recent military victory.

Antigone and the Servant (88–201)

Our attention is concentrated both on the house and family and on what is beyond the walls. What to Jocasta was just an army of Argives (that tragically included her son) becomes individuated into companies: men with names and characters known by insignia. This scene, although it too (like the monologue) gives the setting, has to do with the here and now more than with the past: like its counterpart in the *Iliad*, it is the result of a series of consequential past actions. It is reminiscent too of the opening of *Agamemnon*, where a servant is reporting what we do not see, as well as of the *teichoscopia* in the *Iliad*.[66] The wonder of this scene is that we are not **told** about the men in the plain but we see Antigone seeing them for the first time and we see them with her fresh eyes (as we see the watchman in *Agamemnon* seeing the beacon light with his weary, sad, jaded eyes). Jocasta tells us the play and then Antigone shows, not quite the play, but the present situation which is its subject: a moment ready for tragic change.

The charming rooftop scene presents one of the central paradoxes of the play: it is oddly both intimate and public.[67] The use of the rooftop, not for the divine epiphany or for a surprise opening, but for a girl and a slave to look and pointedly to avoid being looked at (in a place where they must be seen) is a good example of Euripides' ironic use of theatrical conventions and effective use of the playing levels of the Greek scenic space.

The interior/exterior distinction becomes more prominent and at the same time it is blurred in this second part of the prologue. The rooftop is part of the house[68] and is at the same time outside the house. The scene itself and the characters within it look from inside the city and from the house to beyond the walls. It is a remarkable

[66] Aeschylus used the rooftop in *Agamemnon* to surprise us and to focus our attention on the house from the beginning when the watchman shouts out the word θεούς, when we are watching the door for the first entrance. There, too, the character is watching, looking for something that is not seen by us, but through words comes to be there for us. Here we have two characters, one showing, the other looking.

[67] The servant calls attention to the fact that Antigone should not be seen on the roof in public, under the circumstances, an example of scrupulosity on his part. The world Antigone knows is in danger of being burst into and destroyed. That her brother is the source of the danger makes this scene all the more pathetic and the action of her brother all the more grotesque, making us think of both parricide and violation of the inviolable: the crimes of this family. And this must be the primary dramatic purpose of this scene, coming as it does so shortly before the arrival of her brother.

[68] For the location of Antigone's vantage point, see Mastronarde (1990):255–7.

innovation. As the audience we watch actors looking on purpose in our direction and seeing something else where we are. Seeing, in fact, the enemy, that both is and is not the enemy. This is, perhaps, more curious than profound, an intellectual game, a dramaturgical brain teaser.

The entrance of the old *paidagogos* from the interior onto the roof gives added dimensionality to the palace/*skene*. The house becomes more focal: it becomes more of an enclosure (as we measure out its depth and height, through the persons who are enclosed within it and emerge on its summit) and more of an entity. It accommodates more, a more spacious and fuller interior. The old man and the girl emerge from a particular part of the house (unlike Jocasta who just comes out and makes no reference to her coming out or going in, 88, 89, 90). Later the height of the walls surrounding the city are said to be measured for scaling ladders, giving the same kind of dimensionality to an aspect of the unseen exterior, which corresponds more or less to where the audience is sitting.

Again the public/private theme is prominent. The city is there below; the old man is looking for citizens (93); but he does not see any and none come, neither now nor ever in the play. Antigone emerges from the inside. Paradoxically, it is through her, the secluded virgin, that outside space is extended. She looks out over the plain, Dirce and Ismenos, and the great army. We see the actions on the plain with her, at just the same time as she picks them out. There is no messenger's description here where we relive after the fact what an outsider has experienced and at the same time experience it for the first time with the other characters and chorus on stage and in the orchestra. That comes later. Here we have shared perception and a shared feeling of compassion, excitement, and dread that form the theatrical tragic experience. The *Phoenissae*'s Antigone is still an innocent girl, more child than woman, not yet a doer, not yet a victim either: the sufferings of the house (of which her mother had spoken in some detail) have not yet made themselves felt for her beyond recall from the tragic; she can still hope for an ordinary life, the sort of life she renounces at the end of the drama for perhaps too much activity. She is, that is to say, a day younger than her Sophoclean namesake.

This is a genuine **outdoor** scene, using the conventions (both scenic, that all action, however intimate takes place out of doors, and social, that women, especially unmarried women, remain indoors most of

the time, when they are not dancing in a god's festival) and making more of them than usual. When one or more character is a woman the line between adhering to and breaking convention is particularly thin. The prologue scene in the *Antigone*, though in front of the palace was almost an *indoor* scene in feeling, very private and personal. At the end of it Ismene went inside and Antigone truly left the palace for a place beyond our view, but nevertheless a place full of reported drama. Only because of convention and scenic necessity did it take place outside the door. Here we are seeing persons really outside, talking about what they see outside. In this scene, Antigone is the Ismene figure, the old man the bearer of information both personal and political. What is missing in this scene is any choice of action, any dramatic relevance. Still, the play is richer for it and the character of the timid Antigone who leaves with her mother and comes back no longer a child relying on her elders, but a tragic sufferer and doer, is fuller, more persuasive and more true because of this scene.[69]

There is an expansiveness here that is lacking in most of the play and in Theban plays in general.[70] Elsewhere the closeness of a city under siege is felt, of a city closing in on itself, becoming its past, raising the horrors of its family's past and present to a political level. At this point and until the end of the first episode, the besiegers are treated with familiarity and even some sympathy.[71] The old man

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[69] To review/preview the activities of Antigone in *Phoenissae*: She comes out to see the army gathered at the walls and to be informed about the individual leaders and then she returns to her sheltered life, having no part in the doings of the adults, of the men (and their mother). She is called out by her mother and is hesitant to leave her shelter and actually go down to the army in which she had been so interested; but she obeys speedily when she knows her brothers are in danger, overcoming not the laws of nature as she longs to do when she sees her brother out on the plain, but her societal mores. At the end, when she returns from the death scene of her mother and brothers with their three corpses, she is in doubt once more, not whether to act tragically, but which tragic path to take. The situation imposes ambiguity of action on her. The only choice is to do all! But can she do all? "The maturity and depth of character which Antigone shows in the final scene of the *Phoenissae* is made more powerful by her childlike character in the Teichoskopia," Burgess (1987–8):108.

[70] Those, at least, that take place in Thebes. *Suppliants* and *OC* are exceptions.

[71] The identification with the attackers—if that is what the audience feels—is uncomfortable. When Antigone appears on the roof she reveals not only more of the interior, but also by her person what is at stake in this house (and every house in the city). Jocasta had given a broad historical view, speaking in front of the door, going back to the foundation of the city and the more recent troubles. Antigone worries about the locks of the city gates (114–16): the whole city is locked up like a house. The family of Oedipus (especially the males) has difficulty distinguishing

extends the space to include the whole city in our mental staging area (117). The whole plain is bronze covered; it flashes like lightning; the glint is of unindividuated armor spread over the whole field.[72] The old man talks about the size of Polynices' force surrounding the city which becomes the size of the audience surrounding the actors.[73]

The audience is no longer a continuation of chorus and actors as in (most) other plays, but part of the spectacle seen from the roof by the actors, brought by them into the action. Here not a citizen is in sight. Where are the citizens?[74] In other Theban plays the audience is at one with the citizens. In *Antigone* the citizens' voice comes through the chorus early in the play, through Haemon when he tells what is being said on the street and later through the chorus again when they agree with Teiresias. Here the citizen body is absent and the audience is being looked on as *other*. The chorus of foreigners will form yet another barrier between us and the actors. Compare Aeschylus' *Persians* with its chorus of Persian elders in sympathy with the people, the men and women whose homes are disrupted and widowed, and what is known about the *Phoinissai* of Phrynichus: the fact that the chorus is of foreigners in the earlier play may have gone some way in suggesting how bold Aeschylus was in drawing his audience into sympathy with the actors through the chorus. In the *Eumenides* in the final action, what is on stage and in the orchestra is the *polis*, not of royal Argos as it had been in the *Agamemnon*, but the same as the audience: men, women, goddesses, citizens and resident

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between what is and what is not their *oikos*. The two brothers argue about the *polis* as if it were their family estate.

[72] On the quality of the light, see Barlow (1986:1971):57–9 and Irwin (1974):46, etc.

[73] The audience's part here is disturbing. We are not just watching but being looked at. Are we outsiders in sympathy with the insiders? This should be Polynices' role and he does want to see his sisters (and they him), and yet he is subjecting them to possible enslavement and loss of home. Surely we do not—despite Antigone's fondness for the younger of her brothers—agree with Polynices' claim to be acting justly.

[74] In the other Theban plays that take place in Thebes the citizens are prominent: in the prologue of *Septem* the gathered citizens are informed and dismissed to do important work for the defense effort. The chorus of women of citizen stock connects the play more closely with the land and the continuation of Thebes. In *Oedipus* the sick, young and old, are comforted, told what is being done for them and sent home. The chorus is of citizen men, loyal to the king. In *Antigone* the chorus has lived through the horrors of the siege and comes to stand by the new ruler; citizens are prominent too in Haemon's attempt to persuade his father and in Teiresias' prophecy. For a stimulating treatment of the actors, chorus, and audience see Arnott (1989), chapter one (5–43), esp. 10, 19–20 (on *Eumenides*), 21 (on *OT*), 23–5, and 34–5.

aliens; that is, the permanent inhabitants of democratic Athens. No king is made to mediate as in the *Suppliants*: the citizens act directly with their goddess.

In Euripides' *Phoenissae* the *oikos* is enclosed (as always) and fitted out with further enclosures.[75] What is inside comes out. There is no interior action in this play (i.e. imagined as taking place inside the actual *skene* during the time of the drama as there is in the *Alcestis* and *Electra*), but there are characters inside whose existence implies drama. These are brought out into the city. At the end the ranks of those encircling the city are broken and the gates will be opened for departures; for the closed city lets no one out or in. And at the end, this house with all its inner rooms, that were scenes of such dark doings in other (Sophoclean) Theban plays, is the stage of no action. Even Creon's wife is already dead so she cannot kill herself in the halls. And Jocasta comes *out* and goes away to die. She dies out of view (of course: she always does; most people do), but in the imaginary offstage exterior, not inside, not by hanging, but by a sword through her neck, like the self-sacrificial Menoeceus. The bodies are brought into our view from the outside. There is no eccyclema scene. The really dramatic entrance from the house is that of Oedipus for which we wait.[76] Our first hope that Antigone will meet her brother

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[75] The various layers of the Theban inside and outside are:

Inside:
- the maidens' chambers
- the seat of Eteocles' power
- Oedipus' dark crypt
- the undefined interior of the house

Outside:
- Menoikeus' place of *devotio* and Cadmus' site of victory
- the plain around with its various sites
- the streets of Thebes
- Teiresias' place of seerage

[76] **Entrances and Exits** in the *Phoenissae* may be summarized as follows:

Jocasta comes from the house and exits to the house. She returns from the house for the negotiations.

Antigone and the servant come from the house (onto roof) and return to house. Antigone returns from the lower part of the house, called by her mother. The servant does not return as himself.

The Chorus enters from the city and leaves at the end of the drama.

Polynices enters from outside the gates as though walking through the city. He leaves the same way, without talking to the chorus or himself. He returns dead.

Jocasta enters from the palace (sings and dances around her son) and returns to the palace after the failed negotiations. She returns once more for the first messenger's speech.

Eteocles enters from the outside; he has been with his soldiers. Does he return to the palace or remain on stage during the choral song? He enters from the palace to call

is dashed; but her return is still expected. This rooftop scene is her reunion with her brother.

In the prologue Antigone's questioning of the old man arises realistically, from both fear and exhilaration. Her impatience so unlike that violent passionate impatience for which her father is known is the restless inquisitiveness, (seen in her enthusiasms, her exaggerations, 127–30, her curse on Parthenopaeus, 151–3) of a pre-adolescent woman, not yet corrupted into submissiveness. Euripides often shows young people coming to self-, and (sometimes at the same time) other-, awareness and suddenly losing their childhood, like Hippolytus, Iphigenia, and Antigone here. What is needed is more than one scene (rare for sacrificial victims, the role so often played by the young person) for a child or adolescent to grow to adulthood. Death, of course, is a great ager.[77]

Creon or does he simply start to send one of the attendants he entered with? After the scene with Creon he exits into the city with arms and servants. He returns dead.

Creon enters from the city unbidden, looking for Eteocles. He stays on stage for the next episode.

Teiresias enters from the outside with his daughter and Menoeceus. Teiresias and his daughter leave. He does not return.

Menoeceus enters with Teiresias but does not speak until after the old seer has left and his father addresses him. His silent presence is dramatic. We see him hearing. We do not have to hear him.

Creon leaves to go into the city, not to the *skene*, but to his own house for *viaticum* for his son. He returns with the body of his son. Menoeceus says he will exit into the palace, but does not. He goes through the city. He returns dead.

Messenger 1 enters from the battlefield. He exits to the battlefield with the two women. Jocasta enters from the palace, called by the messenger. She leaves to go to the battlefield. She returns dead. Antigone enters from the palace, called by her mother and calls attention to her entrance. She returns with servants carrying the dead.

Creon enters from the city, carrying his son. He stays on stage.

Messenger 2 enters from the battlefield. He leaves at the arrival of Antigone. Antigone enters from the battlefield. She leaves with her father, through the city. Oedipus enters from the house, called by Antigone. He leaves with his daughter, through the city.

Creon is there all along. Only at or near the end he enters the palace. When exactly does he leave?

The corpses, all four of them, might still be there when the play ends. Creon still has his last son Haemon. This is not their play. Oedipus and Antigone have the stage at the end.

Oedipus also is to go out. He is released from his confinement (at the same time) as the city is released from the siege. He is to go wandering, to come among us. Antigone also brings us into the familiar territory of the *Antigone*. The chorus, too, will leave Thebes and finally reach Delphi. Creon is left; Thebes goes on, but there is not much left to interest us. He is far from the broken Creon of *Antigone*.

[77] Menoeceus, too, is certainly young, but he is treated as a trusted near-adult by Eteocles who sends him to Teiresias and especially by his father who shows confidence in his judgment, rare (possibly unique) in father-son relationships in extant tragedy (and thus very different from the Labdacid fathers and sons). The *agon* is

Finally (at 156), she asks about her brother and transfers the word of affection that she would use in addressing him (cf. *Electra* 229, 345, 767), φίλτατε, to the old man. Her view (on the literal level) of her brother is very indistinct. She sees only the shape. Her desire expressed here to run to him is fulfilled at the end of the offstage reported action, but then she arrives too late. He too (168) is seen as a glimmering suit of golden armor shining like the early morning light. The tone is very different here from Aeschylus' play: the enthusiastic Antigone, the hazy visual aspect with the weapons glinting in the early light, the indistinctness of the figures on the plain, seen from afar (in *Septem* they were seen and reported on at much closer range).[78]

What is striking about this stagnant scene (read by some as a set piece patched between the monologue and the parodos, like the scene between Agamemnon and his servant in the *Iphigenia at Aulis*) is the movement which we do not see. It is a well choreographed unseen spectacle. The old man points out that they have come just in time (ἐς καιρόν 106), because the regiments are separating. The mass of foreigners outside the walls is forming into discrete men and groups

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not between father and son, but between brother and brother. There is pre-existent father-son acrimony between Oedipus and his sons in which all these other relatives, in-laws, friends, and strangers are caught with more or less tragic consequences.

[78] The attackers as seen by Antigone:

Hippomedon, from Mycenae, lives by Lerna's waters; what identifies him and makes him stand out is his white crest; he is like an earth-born giant; and he leads the army out in front. (Although he is from Lerna, it is not he but Adrastus who carries the Hydra on his shield.)

Tydeus, the Aetolian, is married to the sister of Polynices' bride; he seems strange, half-barbarous, more foreign than the rest; he is crossing Dirce's water. On his shield which she cannot see is fire.

Parthenopaeus, son of Atalanta, with his long curls is frightful to look at. He is passing by Zethos' tomb of white stone. He will be the first to be killed and those curls will be smashed with a stone.

Polynices is central, but not as individuated as the others until Antigone strains to see him; he is near the tomb of the daughters (παρθένοι) of Niobe and is seen only indistinctly; she sees the impression of his form; he is distinguished by his golden armor, ablaze like the rays of the morning sun.

Adrastus is with Polynices. It is as if Adrastus is more recognizable than Polynices. He does not get any full treatment here and is overshadowed by his son-in-law in Antigone's eyes.

Amphiaraus, the seer has victims with him which produce "streams on the blood-loving earth." He is driving a white team, and is calm and restrained.

Capaneus is called the man who insults us; he is measuring the walls for his scaling ladders and has threatened to bring the women of Thebes in slavery to the women of Mycenae. Capaneus makes clear the fate of the Theban women should the city fall. He does try to scale the walls with these ladders and is struck by lightning.

under leaders. The colors are ghostly reflections; the gleaming of the armor in the early morning mist is caused by the movement of the people. Spaces are distinguished by the movement of the leaders and regiments. The leaders are identified and pointed out by their movements and their situation near specific places (so that, as in the messenger's narrative of the battle, the places are more prominent than the men). The scene is in part about the way we see, identify, and recognize: first the undistinguished mass in the distance, then little by little recognizable shapes are picked out and identified and known on a more significant, ethical and intellectual level. We see what we are told we see.

Details of the Teichoscopia

First there is movement then more stagnant description. The first man to be picked out is leading the army (πρόπαρ, "out in front," 120).[79] He is lifting his shield so that it sparkles (121). He is all in bronze. Antigone picks him out by his white plume (white, like gold and polished bronze, stands out in the haze) and his παγχάλκον ("all of bronze," 121) shield. Once she knows his name she is able to see more than just his outline. She focuses on his appearance and character as she imagines them, using a metaphor from the visual arts (γίγαντι γηγενέτᾳ προσόμοιος ἀστερωπὸς *ἐν γραφαῖσιν*, "dazzling like an earth-born giant in silhouette, in pictures, in outline," 129–130). Of course she has seen only in paintings or sculpture anyone to compare with these men at the gates. Hippomedon is huge and alarming because he is so close and because he is an enemy commander and because he is like paintings or sculptures of the monstrous, inhuman giants.[80]

Do you see the one crossing Dirce (131)? The name of the famous

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[79] This is Hippomedon, *leading the army* (στρατός), not just a regiment (λόχος). Why, we might ask, is Polynices not in the forefront? Hippomedon stands out because he is out in front, because of his white plume, and because he is flashing his shield. After he has been identified, possibly he is to be imagined as having stopped advancing and taken up his position close enough for Antigone to see him clearly.

[80] We learn later that this first-seen giant of a man is carrying a shield with an emblem showing Panoptes (the "all-seeing" guardian monster) and that he is dead before this emblem is seen well enough to be interpreted. He is first here and third in the description of the companies and commanders at the gates. In *Septem* he is in the center and is also huge. The description of him in *Phoenissae* (128) corresponds to that of Capaneus in *Septem* (424) and is like the device on Capaneus' shield here. His shield device in *Phoenissae* of the all-seeing Argus in fact corresponds to the role Eteocles takes on when he dashes around to all the gates in order to be everywhere and see everything.

place directs her gaze in that direction, to another distance, further away than Hippomedon. He is especially troubling because he is very foreign (ἀλλόχρως, μειξοβάρβαρος, 138) and yet connected to Thebes through the ruling family. The two marriages of Adrastus' daughters suggest the alienation of the ruling family from the land and people. This, of course, is confirmation of Polynices' lost status (not only is he married away from the family and forced to live in the home of his wife's family, but he is not even fully human as the oracle of the beast-bridegrooms hints). Polynices' and Tydeus' marriages are two more of the many false or failed couplings mentioned in the play. For although Polynices finds no fault with his marriage to Adrastus' daughter, his death and those of his companions in arms will be its outcome.[81]

Who is that passing around the memorial of Zethus (145, cf. *Septem* 528)? The hostile armies keep coming. And all are identified by their positions on the plain: the land is already winning. At least up to the third commander, they are still on the move, a panorama of men marching in full panoply. Perhaps Antigone turns this way and that, at times including the audience and at times with her back to them. This is Parthenopaeus, curly-haired, eyes like a gorgon to look at (is he that close?) and a fully-armed army follows him (145–150). Antigone wishes him back to his own mountains for his destruction (151–3).[82]

The old man has prior knowledge and so does not have to actu-

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[81] He is fourth in the messenger's description, carries a lionskin and Prometheus with a torch is on his shield, representing two Greek cultural heroes, despite his semibarbaric appearance. Or does he, as Mastronarde argues (1978:122–3), wear a lionskin, carry a torch and himself represent Prometheus? If that is the case, why is his shield not described like all the others'? In *Septem* Tydeus comes first, followed by Capaneus who carries a man with a torch on his shield, the two of them forming a noisy and arrogant pair. If Tydeus is actually carrying a torch and representing Prometheus, then he has become the sign on the shield of the earlier Capaneus.

[82] He is the first to be named in the messenger's speech and the first to be killed. The justice (such as it is) of Polynices' cause does not extend to the mercenaries (154, foreigners) who come with him, but the old man gives it to or accepts it for the whole army (155). Mention of the justice of the cause turns Antigone's and our thoughts to Polynices. This is not right. The foreigners have no claim: this time they have not been treated unjustly. They have come for what they can get. In the *Septem*, Parthenopaeus is equally true to his name in youthful good looks. His shield in the Aeschylean version shows the Sphinx carrying off a Cadmean. In this play it is Adrastus' shield that depicts a monster (the Hydra) carrying off Cadmeans, not a very appropriate image for Thebes. Antigone's prayer about him (151–3) corresponds to that of Eteocles in *Septem* (550–2). Instead of the Sphinx, this Parthenopaeus carries the boar that harried Arcadia, where he should have stayed with his mother to whom he will not return.

ally *see* (142–3), but Antigone's clear view is alarming. Antigone asks the old man to find her brother in the mass of armed men (156). He is with Adrastus.[83] They are near the tomb of the seven virgin daughters of Niobe (159–60, all killed on the same day, a bad omen for Adrastus). She sees the τύπωμα of his μορφῆς ("the outline of his shape," 162). "I do not see him clearly" (161). First he is situated; then he is seen vaguely as a faint form and she desires to "fly" to him (163–5). By the end of her wish she does begin to make him out more clearly. Antigone's imagination, guiding the audience produces an outline of Polynices. At first she could not even find him: now "how brilliant in his golden armor like the dawn rays of the sun" (168–9, he is like the golden warrior on his own shield in *Septem*, 644).[84] The outline she produces comes alive after the parodos, and though the chorus is impressed, Polynices in the round is not viewed by others as positively as his outline is seen by his sister here.[85]

Amphiaraus is identified by the white team he is reining in (171–3).[86] Golden Polynices is like the sun, Amphiaraus suggests the moon.[87] Capaneus is darkness opposed to the light of Amphiaraus. Jerking movement—ἄνω, κάτω (181) suggests that he is leaping about the walls—opposes the controlled dignity of the seer. Antigone's last two invocations are to Selene (after seeing Amphiaraus) and to Nemesis and the roaring lightning of Zeus (after Capaneus has been pointed

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[83] Adrastus is not one of the seven attackers in *Septem*, but he is mentioned in the spy's first speech, because before the battle he is collecting tokens from the men to take home to their parents. He is himself a false father in both plays, leading the men on a hopeless and impious mission.

[84] On reading the riddles of the shields see Goff (1988):138–159 and Said (1985):506–9.

[85] Antigone's visual perceptions are analogous to the development of his character and his cause, at first seen in the abstract. The more we know of him and his "justice" the more we must reject it. He is fifth in the messenger's speech. Adrastus is last. Of course, in *Septem* he is last and carries himself on his shield. For all the cunning craftsmanship of his shield in *Phoenissae* and the depiction of the colts from a story associated with Thebes he misses the point of the shields in the earlier play as they all do. With his maddened horses he seems to want to emulate the failed attacker Eteoclus (461–4) in *Septem*.

[86] As Craik points out (*ad* 172) the sacrificial victims dripping blood make him less a stranger to this story. See also Mastronarde (1994) *ad loc.*

[87] He is mentioned second in the messenger's speech and, as in *Septem* (where he is significantly sixth, just before rather than just after Polynices), he has no design on his shield. In the *Phoenissae* his Aeschylean role of pointing out the folly of Polynices' mission is taken by Jocasta (compare *Septem* 576–89 and *Phoenissae* 568–585). In both plays, too, the adjective σώφρων is characteristic of him (*Septem* 568, *Phoenissae* 177, 1112).

out). Capaneus' threats (through which Antigone characterizes the man even before she sees him, 179) make the city no longer just its walls: the women are threatened too. Antigone's fate could be enslavement if the walls fall to these men.[88]

The relationship between these warriors and their Aeschylean counterparts is very complex, with most of the shields changed considerably, but with some of the warriors transformed into others' shield devices and some of them stepping out of the shields and becoming warriors, as Capaneus is an embodiment of Eteoclus' shield device. But the men who lift pieces of the walls to bombard the enemy are Thebans.

The old man and Antigone disappear into the house[89] at the sight and sound of the chorus approaching. The house is closed again. The old man ends with an unwarranted sneer about women, a bow perhaps to the Eteocles of *Septem*.

Jocasta and Antigone

What is the relationship of the two prologue scenes to each other? Jocasta gives the history of Thebes, a quick genealogy, more details of her own generation and her confused but clearly explained family relations. She relates the present to the past by means of the cosmic regularity of the sunrise. The time between has changed the past. Nothing of note in her telling happened between the eras of Cadmus and Labdacus. But beginning with the marriage of Laius, Jocasta

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[88] Capaneus is sixth in the messenger's speech, carries an earthborn giant on his shield, and, of course, true to his name he is struck by lightning. His shield device is like a picture Antigone had seen and compared Hippomedon to. He himself has come alive from the *Septem*'s Eteoclus' shield device (466–7) of an armed man climbing a ladder who, like Hippomedon in *Phoenissae*, threatened Thebes with slavery. In both plays Capaneus threatens the walls, uttering δεινά (*Septem* 426, *Phoenissae* 179). In *Septem*, where he appears early to establish the arrogance of the attackers, he is γίγας (424); here his shield device is of a giant carrying a whole city on his shoulders.

[89] There is no interior action. But that is not to say that the inside of the house lacks significance. Antigone is sent back home where she remains until her mother calls her out. Jocasta is called out by the chorus when Polynices arrives; Eteocles enters not from the house, but from the outside, from the war (perhaps he stays on stage until his next speech); Eteocles sends for Creon and Creon arrives from the outside before the servant has been dispatched. Teiresias is summoned from the outside, by Eteocles through Menoeceus. Jocasta is called out of the house by the messenger; she in turn calls out Antigone; she in turn calls out her father. The house is being emptied. Creon tries to call his sister out, but she is already dead. At the end he must enter the house alone. The two exiles leave. The chorus is ready to go on its way. The palace of Cadmus stands like a relic after the devastation of the family of Cadmus. It is made clear that Creon is not a descendant of Cadmus, but the penultimate generation of the Spartoi.

became involved in Theban royal politics. One son was born in each generation. Then came Laius who was not to have a son. If he had obeyed the oracle the heart of the Theban cycle would have been lost. The tradition is kept in suspense while Laius fails to have a son and then has one and tries to get rid of him. The second part of the oracle "the whole family will walk through blood" is what he leaves to his heirs. Today is the day on which all of that ancient prediction will be fulfilled. The οἶκος of Cadmus-Polydorus-Labdacus-Laius will be annihilated, as if it had never been, but for the poetic tradition, the song of Thebes. Only the sons' story is told: until today only the men have a story. They will bring to a climax the suffering of the house initiated by Laius. Antigone, one of the survivors, will also suffer a breath-taking loss, not only of her mother and brothers, but of her future, almost of her identity, since she loses the marriage that would have given her status and fulfillment and she loses her home. Whether she is actually to be thought of as trying to bury her brother after the play is over, there seems to be no future for her after her father's projected death in Athens, no home to return to, no marriage to Haemon to expect, nor—most wrenching of all—even any fame as the heroic girl who dared to defy Creon. She gets the better of Creon and he lets her defy him. In going with her father, she accepts a traditional female role, ancillary to the masculine members of her family. And she loses the girlhood, so charmingly displayed in the rooftop scene. What she loses is a life, whether fit for living in the ordinary world of repeated day-to-day activities or in the heroic world of grand and generous and fatal action, something Sophocles had given her fleetingly.

3. *Relatives and Other Strangers: Parodos and First Episode*

Entrance of the Foreign Women

The chorus is seen (by the characters on the rooftop and by the spectators) making an entrance. They are offerings (ἀκροθίνια, 203) to Apollo. Their fate (though in exile from their home) is less tragic because it is already known and accepted with hope and because it is collective.[90] Like Antigone the choral singers use language from

[90] Although they are exiles and captives who have lost their girlhood, their dedication to Apollo saves them from a worse fate and they look forward to peace and their service at Delphi, a worthy life for women of ancient Greece who have so

the visual arts (220, ἀγάλμασι χρυσοτεύκτοις "gold-wrought statues"), but the difference is immense: they are talking about themselves as the golden votive offerings; she is talking about the men in the battlefield as if they were monumental sculptures of great mythical triumphs over monsters with which temples are so often decorated. Her imagery is particularly apt in relation to her own earth-born, monstrous Theban heritage. The chorus' image is appropriate to their role in the play.

Why does Euripides use a chorus of foreigners? Among other advantages they do not take the focus away from the family by turning it to the city.[91] They give a wider background in space and time, tightly connecting the present with the city's and the ruling family's origins, that is, with the heart of the play, Thebes' history. They are, perhaps, more decorative than emotionally entangled in events, but that makes them more appreciative of the subtleties of the song in which they are taking part. And it makes us more objective: we are not drawn into sympathy with Thebes. When all is over, they (like us) will leave. They will not be a real part of the history of this place any more than Euripides has given them for the duration of this drama, but a teller of the history. Their longing to leave Dirce parallels their earlier departure and is a connection between their own story and the present at Thebes which will be abandoned less happily by the progeny of Laius, the last of Cadmus' descendants.

Parodos (202–260): movements and destinations[92]

The chorus has come over the seas, following, as it were, in Cadmus' Phoenician footsteps. Whether they are booty won in war or thank offerings for victory,[93] any violence implied here and later when they identify themselves for Polynices has been smoothed and soothed by the lovely sounds of the Zephyr's breezes that brought them to

little to look forward to. The Theban maidens, should the city be captured, as Capaneus threatens, would serve the women of Mycenae and at Lerna.

[91] On the choice of Phoenician women for the chorus for the presentation of the vicissitudes of the family of Cadmus, see van der Valk (1985):16; also Mastronarde (1994):208–9.

[92] On the choral odes and their centrality to the play, see Arthur's marvelous article, *passim*.

[93] Cf. *Pho.* 281–2 and Craik *ad loc.* and Mastronarde 208–9. As thank offerings they form a bloodless parallel to the other, Greek, offerings, Erechtheus' daughter and Menoeceus who are *sacrificed* for victory.

mainland Greece. The fact that they are still in transit, temporary residents (part guest, part prisoner) is equally significant. Their only past is that journey and their heritage which connect the pasts of the cities of the ancestors, Agenor's sons, Io's sons and daughters. They are not much more than speaking statues (220, ἴσα δ' ἀγάλμασι χρυσοτεύκτοις), picked for their decorative qualities (215). Like inscriptions under votive statues, they address the audience, as the votives address the passerby. The chorus is another of the many surprises, no longer the citizen chorus of *Septem*, *Antigone*, and *OT* (see Craik, 181). Also as foreigners their story differs from Antigone's whose fate seems at this point to be tied to the land. But there must be more to it than Euripides' yen for the exotic and colorful (Craik 181): the other Theban plays are so political, so land- and people-centered. This exotic chorus—because even the exotic is kin to Thebes—can provide historical perspective. As a reflection of the scenes that precede, the chorus repeats the connection made by Jocasta between the arrival from Phoenicia and the war that surrounds the city. With Antigone they share the young woman's perspective. What she has to fear, they have already suffered at least in being taken from their homes. In their second strophe and antistrophe they sing of Ares outside the walls and of the sons of Oedipus, looking ahead to the scene in which we witness a verbal duel, in which Ares (always stalking Thebes) comes inside.

In the mesode the chorus sees itself as a chorus (236) at Delphi: they are already *the* chorus, the group of dancers, celebrating the history of Thebes, their own and the city's past and present, but not yet consecrated to Apollo and the other gods of Delphi. This stanza is a kind of escape song. They wish for their destined future as beautiful servants, with the present peril already in the past. Their vision of the future is very place oriented.[94] They know the mythology and topography of Delphi, which turns out to be the fruitful place to which the sea where no fruit grows is contrasted (cf. ἀκαρπίστων 211, and πολύκαρπον 230). At the end they turn back to Dirce, a place of fear, in opposition to Kastalia for which they long. In this ode, the waters are particularly noticed along with the gods of the

[94] As is the whole ode: as Marilyn Arthur points out, it is a juxtaposition of locales (166–9). My only point of disagreement, and that a tentative one, is with the *peacefulness* of the prehistoric Phoenician past. That past is made peaceful by the transit and by contrast with the Theban battleground of hate, but the chorus itself has suffered war and been uprooted from home.

places (Apollo, Dionysus, various goddesses and Ares), fires (226, 241), and towers (233, 245).

The fires flashing connect this ode with the previous scene (and in turn with the monologue's addresses to the rising sun: 251 φλέγει; cf. Antigone's view of the glistening but unidentified armor on the plain, before she makes out individuals). The light of Ares replaces that of Dionysus and now as the full sun is up the light glares and the cloud of shields flashes out (241, 251) giving us a picture of how it looks around the city with the dust raised by the troops and the armor gleaming menacingly in the morning sun.

The movement of the ode is from the origins of the chorus to their destination to the immediate situation, the enclosure, the city surrounded. The *teichoscopia* looked out from the inside. The parodos is pointedly inside but wanders far afield in speech and imagination, and ends with the singers still trapped by the place, its mythology and history.

The justice of Polynices' cause is reiterated immediately before the arrival of Polynices. The old man had worried because justice is on the side of the besiegers.[95] This is another surprise. The *Septem* had emphasized the city, people, and land of Thebes and the violence and impiety of those attacking her. In the earlier play, the one just man outside (as opposed to the rival fraternal claimants) is Amphiaraus. He is set up in opposition to the one unjust and cursed man inside, Eteocles.[96] In the *Phoenissae,* the old man's remark is perhaps unpatriotic or perhaps it is more objective than the belief expressed over and over again in the *Septem* that the gods are on the side of the city.[97]

First Episode (261–637)

Polynices is a native returning to his homeland after something more than a year's absence and he is also meaningfully made by the staging to be a stranger among strangers. He is the warrior seen from the battlements come to life, come to penetrate the city with his

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[95] Like Hector in the *Iliad,* the old man says that the besiegers (Greeks united to right a wrong done) have justice on their side.

[96] See Thalmann (1978):117–118.

[97] Although even in *Septem* it is more sophisticated than that in the actual working out of the opposing commanders, their shields and characters which is a kind of moral riddle-reading.

sword drawn.[98] It is as if mention of Polynices brings him on (as in *Alcestis*, words of praise sung to her facilitate the resurrected heroine's arrival on the scene). His loneliness and alienation are increased by this dramatically visual manifestation of the man from the words said about him.

The truce has been struck but he is still mistrustful, as if someone would break out of the shadows of these familiar places no longer his own and find him and kill him as a stranger and enemy. His actions are characterized by stealth, as if he were the hunter (with drawn weapon) or the prey.[99] But hunting and activities associated with young men coming of age in the wild take place at the edges of civilization.[100] Here Polynices has brought them into the midst of the city. The sword he bears in his hand (267, 276) gives him whatever confidence he has, not the "justice of his cause."[101]

Like the chorus of the *Septem* Polynices fears every sound. The chorus of the *Phoenissae* by contrast is calm. In *Septem* the legend on his shield says that justice leads him back from exile to reclaim his home, his city and his father's halls. It is as if this chorus of talking statues is taking the place of the words on the shield device and democratizing the figure of justice into a group.

Polynices is a surprise: in his presence on stage at all and in his timidity contrasted to the confidence of his offstage boast in *Septem*. He cries out in alarm at a sound, claiming that the bold are afraid

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[98] No Theban soldiers have been seen as they are in the *Septem*, at least in the persons of the spy and Eteocles (who also there, as at his entrance in this play, is not yet dressed in his panoply) and the men (supernumeraries) Eteocles sends off to prepare for their battle stations in the prologue. The first armed man *we* see here is the enemy, entering, as it were, the womb of his mother city from the group of armed attackers.

[99] Cf. *Black Hunter* and the war games of the ephebes and of the Spartans in the countryside. For the image of the **hunt** see *City of Images*.

[100] The young man returning after exile is a universal theme, not just in myth, but in life. The ephebes return after their year at the borders being in transition between men and boys, animals and humans. Warriors return after the season of fighting. They, of course, are welcomed back ceremoniously. Polynices is let in; the gates about which Antigone worried in the *teichoscopia* are reluctantly opened for him. No one sees him and he sees no one until he reaches the palace and is questioned by the chorus. He arrives just too late to see and be seen at close range by his sister.

[101] In the *Septem*, Polynices' shield shows an armed man led by a female figure representing Justice, with the legend "I will lead him home" (648). Of course like the earlier Polynices, he does claim the justice of his cause, but his is not the winning argument: his brother keeps the sceptre.

of everything (almost a laugh line in this tense scene),[102] as if he were a spy sent behind enemy lines. But in fact he has come home to a familiar scene, made unfamiliar by the presence of a chorus of women who are forced to remain in Thebes because of his actions, but are unknown to him.[103] It is home, but he refers to his native land as enemy territory (271).[104]

In the scene between mother and son young and old are contrasted; most of the scenes are between old and young throughout the play.[105] He is in bright armor, carrying a sword (this sword or one very much like it will be used for Jocasta's suicide and will play a part in the brothers' mutual slaughter). She is dressed in black. She is so eager to see him that she evinces no fear. She embraces him tenderly, touches his cheek, feels his hair on her neck. Jocasta actually dances around her son for a few lines (312–317).[106] The fact that she sings shows her deep emotion.[107] Her joy at seeing him is mixed with her sorrow. She is already in mourning: she has already lost this son. The tone of her song changes to the sorrows of the parents, her own and Oedipus', and then to the alienation of Polynices through his marriage away from home to a foreigner.

Oedipus' existence in the house is most vividly described in Jocasta's monody. The blind man is alienated, passing his time in tearful long-

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[102] See Rehm (1992):48, "Although not normally associated with tragedy, humorous moments scattered through the plays pull the audience out of the immediate circumstances with a laugh, only to drop them back with a vengeance."

[103] The chorus is a community of aliens, a genuine community with only a communal identity, who have arrived after Polynices was denied his share in the city and his turn to rule. He cannot recognize the first people he sees nor they him and both must ask each other's identity.

[104] Certainly he is an enemy to his fellow citizens and even to the sister who loves him and whom he loves. If this were not paradoxical enough, the distinction between friend/enemy (cf. 374, 1446), native/foreigner is blurred in various ways (the marriage on which Jocasta dwells, for example; his coming inside his native city under a truce and in fear; his simultaneous trust and distrust of even his mother; the treatment he receives from Eteocles): Polynices really is both alien and native.

[105] Scenes listed by the *OLD*-YOUNG contrast: *Jocasta* alone—*old servant* and Antigone—Polynices alone—*Jocasta* and Polynices—Eteocles, Polynices and *Jocasta*—Eteocles and *Creon*—*Tiresias* and his daughter with Menoeceus—*Tiresias* and *Creon*—*Creon* and Menoeceus—Menoeceus alone/Messenger and *Jocasta*—*Jocasta* and Antigone—*Creon* and messenger—Antigone—Antigone and *Oedipus*—*Creon* and Antigone and *Oedipus*—Antigone and *Oedipus*.

[106] See Rubbi (1967):*passim*, especially 403–7 on this dance as contramaledictory and 402 where she calls Jocasta's signs of mourning "*un lutto profetico*" because she already knows of the imminent death of her sons.

[107] On this monody see Cerbo (1989):44–7.

ing. He has made more than one suicide attempt[108] with the sword or the noose. He both longs for his sons and curses them.[109] The same inconsistency is there at the end in the pitiful scene where he touches the dead bodies of his sons. Her monody draws us back to the end of her monologue: the miseries of the house and her own miseries. Thebes was silent at her son's wedding. The women of the chorus respond to Jocasta's monody by speaking of women's love for their children.

Jocasta attributes the ruin of the family to the gods (352 and later Oedipus will too, using logic and the argument from probability, the probability of human intelligence and self-preservation, to say that the gods had a hand in his ruin). We may remember Jocasta's agnostic role in *OT* and, in general in that play the irony and ambiguity of the oracles and the disastrous results of the paradoxical simultaneous belief and disbelief in them: belief would make one a fatalist; only the combination of disbelief and belief allows a person to destroy him- or herself and others in running from them, a thing which happens to some extent in the *Phoenissae* too. Gods are prominent in the play (the chorus' destination, for example, is Delphi; the role of Teiresias and the history of Thebes throw emphasis on Ares and Dionysus besides Apollo). Different divinities are associated with different characters. Antigone calls on Artemis in various aspects, both bright and sinister, and is later associated with Dionysus.[110] The Chorus is dedicated to Apollo, but also clarifies the influence of Ares and Dionysus on events in Thebes. Thebes itself is special to Ares, in the φίλος-ἐχθρός pattern of family relationships that marks things tragic and things Theban.[111]

And what about the two brothers' relationship with the gods? Polynices calls on the gods more than Eteocles does. Polynices' trust in the gods (275–6) is another anomaly. But he still thinks he is a patriot (358–9). He gains confidence at the sight of the altars and puts away his sword. Polynices claims his love of country and of his

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[108] Since usually it is women who kill themselves in the dark spaces of the house this is another surprise.

[109] Cf. Craik *ad loc.* who sensibly keeps the inconsistency.

[110] See Seaford (1990):89 on maenadism as an alternative for Antigone.

[111] The scenes that concern the armies are for the most part secularized, another break with *Septem* (where the enemy commanders are making sacrifice and swearing their allegiance; in *Phoenissae* they are on the move, preparing for their attack). Prayers come before the single combat. Lightning (from Zeus) brings a stop to the first battle by helping the Thebans.

father's **walls** into which he has come. He lists sites in Thebes, physical objects, places: halls, altars, gymnasia, the stream of Dirce. He particularizes the things of which he has been deprived as well as showing his awareness that he has come among enemies. These are the things that would be his if he wins. He misses the familiar faces and places. But what about the people, his family, his father, his mother, his sisters and the forgotten citizens and resident aliens? Eteocles' patriotism is expressed when he is insulting his brother (e.g. at 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 611) and in his scene with Creon, where he does put the safety of the city above his hatred for his brother and in the report of the battle.[112] His gods are abstractions.

Patriotism for the brothers hardly seems to include the citizens, but the walls, the towers, the gates, other physical features and monuments, and above all the sceptre, the symbol of ownership of this pile of rock. Πατρίδος ἐρᾶν 359 is seen by Polynices as a universal necessity. The worst thing is being deprived of speaking openly (391); that is the part of a slave (392). And agreeing with those in power whether they have sense or not (393–5).[113] But under the circumstances, Polynices is all too ready to agree with Adrastus, though Adrastus' plan was from the beginning ill-conceived, requiring the successful completion of two wars of aggression. On the other hand, having once raised the army for the purpose of regaining the monarchy, Polynices is not in the position to accept the compromise offered by Eteocles, that he may return home (and therefore be in possession of all but the rule). He is last sighted with Adrastus before he enters the city, emphasizing his new connection and his new allegiances and obligations to people like the exotic Tydeus, his brother-in-law, whose cause he must support should he succeed here. Next in the list of woes is the lack of daily sustenance. Hopes fill the exile's feed bin (cf. βόσκω 396, 400, 405) and though they are always unfulfilled, they bring pleasure anyway. But he could in fact return to his homeland, though not as king.[114] This is not fair, but as his brother

[112] For a positive treatment of Eteocles, see Willink (1990), esp. 183–187. It might be argued, on the other hand, that Creon's interference is what guarantees that Eteocles postpone his vendetta with his brother, by offering a winning strategy at the walls.

[113] These are among the famous sentiments of the play, that made it so popular in later antiquity. See Bremer (1983:286–7).

[114] Polynices swears (θεοὺς δ' ἐπώμοσ' 433–4) that it is against his will that he comes against his city, and asks his mother to put an end to the troubles for all concerned (με καὶ σὲ καὶ πᾶσαν πόλιν 437). His first love, his first loss is τὰ χρήματα

points out events are not governed by fairness. Human beings act out of self-interest in their dealings with one another, not out of a sense of justice, according to Eteocles' words and this principle is exemplified by the actions of both brothers and those of the soldiers.

Polynices tells (409) the oracle about the beasts and stimulates Jocasta's interest in it.[115] Is this genuine interest or just stichomythic convention to get the audience to notice the oracle that turns Polynices into a beast in the eyes of the gods? In her maternal character, Jocasta would be interested and indeed has already expressed interest in her son's marriage outside the community.[116] She speaks of the foreign marriage as hateful to her and Laius, as if Laius were still her husband. And in fact he is the one she calls πόσις (Laius: 9, 13, 35, 39, 218, 288, 341, 868, 1598, 1611).[117] Polynices says he does not know (413) what the **name of beasts** has to do with him, but he tells the story of his confrontation with Tydeus at the palace to explain it. This is a very definite reference to (one of) the brothers as beasts. In the battle they are first boars and then lions. It is a good example because it is evidence that the characteristic is noticed by outsiders, by both the prophetic god and Adrastus.

The scene is full of pity and fear, but is also at times almost comic.

(possessions, 439–440). His poverty has made him ignoble. He admits to coming after τὰ χρήματα (442–3). And later Eteocles will be accused of greed for wealth, of demanding more than his share. And he is far from denying it: he would be disgraced if he were fair to his brother and accepted less when he has and can continue to have more.

[115] Oracles are like a combination of riddles and gossip about the famous, both irresistible.

[116] As in *Medea*, Medea interrupts Aegeus' telling of the oracle: this calls attention to the thing so that it does not get lost. In the earlier play the subject of the enigma is a major (*the* major) issue of the play and associated with Medea: her ability to ruin men (her father, Creon, and finally Jason) through their children. Things do not bode well for Aegeus and Athens. Here the oracle correctly identifies Polynices and Tydeus and prepares the way for the identification of both brothers with wild boars (1380).

[117] Laius in the *Phoenissae*:

9 and from him (Labdacus), Laius
13 and Laius married me
35 Laius my husband (on his trip to the oracle to ask about the child)
39 Laius' driver
218 to Laius' kindred towers
288 my father is Oedipus, Laius' son
341 to your mother and to Laius born in the past
868 This land is sick from long ago, since Laius fathered a child against the will of the gods, to be husband to his mother, poor Oedipus
1598 Apollo prophesied to Laius that I not [yet] born was my father's murderer
1611 having taken up Laius' curse and passing it on to my children.

It allows Polynices to introduce himself in a formal way to the chorus who have never seen him; it makes possible Jocasta's greeting and happiness to see him again. And all this can happen without Eteocles. Another surprise is that Eteocles is upstaged by his brother; but this is one of the few instances when Polynices (the screaming eagle of the *Antigone*) gets any sympathy at all. Is it that Polynices is the favorite in the family or among the womenfolk or that Eteocles is always there and Polynices, the exiled and mistreated younger child, receives the prodigal son treatment while his dull brother takes over the family estate? That Polynices should have the sympathy of the chorus and the family (his mother, his sister, the old retainer) up to a point is itself a surprise.

From the first Polynices' words are full of contradictions.[118] Φρονῶν εὖ κοὐ φρονῶν (357): here, he is both trusting and not trusting his mother (272), acting both prudently and foolishly. All this confirms the ambiguity of his position. He is just in making his claim, but this is one of those situations in which λόγος alone will not solve the problem. Reason tells us that this war is avoidable. But Polynices, the "just" man, has made it inevitable by bringing a large force (clearly larger than his brother's, larger than Thebes alone could possibly muster) against his native city. In the *agon*, Polynices will claim to speak the plain truth in plain words, but from the first words he utters to his mother, it is clear that the truth is anything but simple.[119] Reason and persuasion are ineffective. The story overwhelms the participants. The λόγος of Thebes overwhelms other kinds of λόγοι.

Enter Eteocles. His haste is apparent throughout his speech: his first two lines contain four abrupt sentences.[120] Jocasta hopes for the emotional argument to work: this is your brother; look at him. But

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[118] See Goff (1988) on the "extraordinary" language in the play, especially p. 143.

[119] 357 He claims to be acting both sensibly and senselessly.
357–8 Though a native son, he has come into *enemy* territory.
359 His love of his country does not prevent him from attacking her. (And see 366 for the tears he shed on seeing his beloved city once again.)
361–5 He voices both his fear of and his trust in the truce.
374 The central contradiction, the enmity of loved ones is summed up in these simple, but riddling words: ἔχθρα . . . οἰκείων φίλων.
377 In a doubtful line he speaks of his father as looking on darkness (σκότον δεδορκώς).

[120] Jocasta stops him with her speech on justice as a deliberative virtue, but like nearly everything else of hers, it is personal. The truce is not political, but personal. She has called them here because they are brothers, her sons, not because they are rival commanders.

it does not work. The look of love or forgiveness or compassion comes too late and is inarticulate.[121]

Polynices and Eteocles offer matched speeches. The arguments are those that each brother would be expected to make. Eteocles has no justification, but since he holds the power he does not need any and even admits that he is acting unjustly. Justice does not have much to do with power, with politics, with action. Perhaps his passion for tyranny and calm acceptance of injustice are surprising in view of his brother's present and traditional claim to *Dikē*, since in a law court we do not expect one of the litigants to admit to injustice and insist upon his claim to keep his ill-gotten gains anyway. But this is not a court of law: Jocasta is not a jury, only another speaker. The eloquent defense of equality, coming from her, the defender of the family, may be the most surprising part of the episode. It is odd that she would make a political argument at all. Like her older son, Jocasta expresses an ideology, but one that allows compromise. She pleads for equality and the yielding of equal to equal on personal, familial, political, and cosmic levels. Jocasta's speech would win if this were merely a rhetorical display (at least in a democratic setting). In the event, equality turns out to be just another noun, not even applying taphonomically to the brothers.

The entrance of Polynices had been announced by the chorus before they even saw him. "Not unjustly he comes under arms to this struggle" (εἰς ἀγῶνα τόνδ', 259). At the end of the *agon* Eteocles, always in a hurry, announces the end of the "struggle of words" (λόγων ἀγών, 588). Nothing is accomplished by the *agon* beyond the heightened animosity of the two interlocutors, their decision to meet in mortal combat, and the despair of their mother who has tried to mediate the dispute.[122] No new factual or mythical information is gained. The facts are inarguable. Eteocles does not deny the justice of his brother's claim, he simply will not yield. Nor will his brother, even after his mother (using as her "proof" the wording of the prayers he would make if he won) points out that he is in a situation, in which victory is impossible. As usual the *agon* breaks down into name

[121] Jocasta's generalization ("if you can look into his eyes" 462) and her talk of where the eyes look (455–63) sets the scene for their final battle, when they seek out each other's eyes, for the kill, and to their reported death scene when all the dying and voiceless Eteocles can do is look soulfully at his mother.

[122] The outcome of the *agon* of course is not unexpected. Rarely is any progress made in the *agones* of which Euripides was so fond. See M. Lloyd, (1992):5; 14–15.

calling and brutal threats. The brothers return to the struggle of battle away from that of words.

Both brothers tend toward a (verbal) devaluation of traditional values.[123] The experience, Polynices had pointed out, is greater than the *word* for losing one's country: thus (389) he began the debasing of words as applying to things or as containing the heart of the things they name. The exile does not have the ability to speak openly (391) and must put up with the mindless actions of his rulers. In a monarchy, all are at the mercy of the foolish decisions of the ruler or ruling family. Creon, for example, is a trusted elder statesman and gives advice[124] that is heeded (something of a literary rarity, but a parallel to the scout in *Septem* and of course to the Iliadic Nestor), but even he can only postpone, not stop the brothers determined on bloodshed, nor can he protect himself from making foolish decisions when his turn comes. Jocasta's speech on equality—though she does not say so—takes into account the fact that monarchy is not the ideal system of government, a thing implied (at 393) by her younger son when he speaks of the folly of those in power. Next Polynices rejected the worth of friends (403 τὰ φίλων δ' οὐδέν) and even their existence in misfortune. Nobility and high birth are equally meaningless when it comes to filling one's belly (405 τὸ γένος οὐκ ἔβοσκέ με "my [high] birth did not feed me" and 442 πένης γὰρ οὐδὲν εὐγενὴς ἀνήρ "an indigent is not noble"). He had already equated his abject fear on entering his native land with boldness (270). His patriotism allows him to bring an army to sack his own city. He is forced to equate friends with enemies and be the enemy to his family and city. He accepts for himself the name of "beast". Not virtue or justice or courage but τὰ χρήματα is the most honored or valuable human aspiration (439). Already before his major speech in the *agon* he had reduced to virtual meaninglessness the value terms friendship, trust, love of country, nobility: all are less than money and power. His brother is perhaps no worse. He is even more candid. Power even more than truth needs only simple words.

Polynices' major speech balances the just and the unjust: the un-

[123] Both favor a materialistic view. Polynices loves his country and misses its buildings and places, but most of all he wants what is due him, obviously not just to live in his native land, but to live there as ruler and, one supposes, without his brother.

[124] His advice (like Teiresias') is about how to best protect the city. Really it is only second best (as is Teiresias' crueler demand). Jocasta's attempt was the best effort.

just λόγος needs φαρμάκων σοφῶν because it is sick in itself (472). The statement of his cause is clear enough and since Eteocles does not deny it, we must surely accept it as factually accurate. The chorus (497–8) agrees that Polynices has spoken sensibly (ξυνετά). He admits at the end of the speech that he will attack the towers and destroy his native land. Some things cannot be argued. Words and reason fail. At least this Polynices does not claim to be leading the army against Thebes for the abstract principle of justice, but his share of the power and wealth.

How true is what he says of his speech? He says that his speech is simple, but the conceit of the diseased unjust λόγος in need of clever prescriptions with which he contrasts his own simple straightforwardness is decidedly sophisticated, not to mention self-serving. That a speaker in a debate should claim to be speaking justly and telling the plain truth comes as no surprise. His oration is full of value terms (470 τῆς ἀληθείας, 471 τἄνδιχ', 472 καιρόν, ἄδικος λόγος, 480 κακόν, 490 δίκης, 492 σὺν δίκης, δίκης ἄτερ, 493 ἀνοσιώτατα, 496 ἔνδιχ', to name only the most clearly value-laden words he produces). He begins and ends with protestations of his simplicity and of the justice of his cause. Most of the speech merely tells what happened, something that is never in doubt: that is not one of the surprises in the play. The logical argument against Eteocles is left to Jocasta, as is that against Polynices.

Names[125] and naming are important throughout the play. In

[125] On naming and names see Craik's notes *ad* 27, 55–8, 412, 499–502, 1702 and Mueller-Goldingen (1985):40. Naming in the *Phoenissae*:

(12 "They called me Jocasta; my father gave me this" name: the word ὄνομα is not used.)
27 Ἑλλὰς ὠνόμαζεν Οἰδίπουν.
55–8 the naming of the children 57–8 Ἰσμήνην πατὴρ / ὠνόμασε, τὴν δὲ πρόσθεν Ἀντιγόνην ἐγώ.
124 τίς ὀνομάζεται; Antigone is asking about one of the leaders of the regiments (Hippomedon).
407 οὐδ' ὀνομάσαι δύναι' ἂν ὡς ἐστὶν φίλον. Polynices is claiming his ineffable love for his country.
412 καὶ σοὶ τί θηρῶν ὀνόματος μετῆν, τέκνον.
501–2 νῦν δ' οὔθ' ὅμοιον οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἴσον βρότοις, πλὴν ὀνομάσαι·
553 τί δ' ἔστι τὸ πλέον; ὄνομ' ἔχει μόνον·
612 ἀθέμιτόν σοι μητρὸς ὀνομάζειν
636–7 ἀληθῶς δ' ὄνομα Πολυνείκην πατὴρ ἔθετό σοι θείᾳ προνοίᾳ νεικέων ἐπώνυμον.
751 ὄνομα δ' ἑκάστου διατριβὴ πολλὴ λέγειν Eteocles does not bother to give the names of his squadron leaders: this is ostensibly a reference to the *Septem*, but it is more truly part of the movement away from the citizens. The brothers are simply not interested in the people of Thebes as individual human beings. Like his uncle in Sophocles' earlier play, Eteocles would be a good king in a desert. There are

Eteocles' speech (especially at 502, πλὴν ὀνομάσαι) he makes a distinction between the name and the fact: τὸ ἔργον οὐκ ἔστιν τόδε. Only the **names** are ἴσον and ὅμοιον (501; cf. Craik *ad loc.*). But the definitions, the import and importance vary. The shifting of predication signals the shifting of meaning. On the other hand, Eteocles' speech (unlike his brother's) is full of surprises, most of which are directly related to his values. He admits that there is a time when injustice is allowable. Eteocles immediately plunges into what he thinks is good:[126] Tyranny is the greatest of gods! It is τὸ χρηστόν ("the good"). Ἀνανδρία is to accept less when one can have more. What he is ashamed of (510 αἰσχύνομαι) is to yield to his brother's force, but the facts both inside and outside the action show that he would not yield to his brother's just and irenic plea either. He will not in any case yield the *rule*. Under truce and in battle, **he** is the same: he lives by these new definitions. *Injustice* can be called κάλλιστον (the highest good). This is the only way a man could do what Eteocles is doing. Usually we do not have the opportunity to see so clearly the intellectual background of a mythological dramatic character.[127] Here we are given the mind of Eteocles almost in a flash-back to his original refusal to yield to his brother and can see how the situation came to such a pass and cannot be changed after being justified intellectually.

Eteocles' passion and eloquence are his defense. He too claims to be speaking openly, showing us that sincerity is not necessarily a virtue. His claim that it would be a disgrace for Thebes to yield to

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other reasons for his not naming the men in detail. This comes later. But only enemy captains are named, with one exception (Periklymenos, 1157).

1314 τοὔνομα λαβὼν γενναῖον. Creon over the dead body of his son

1493 ὦ Πολύνεικες, ἔφυς ἄρ' ἐπώνυμος. Antigone to her dear dead brother

1702 ὦ φίλτατον δῆτ' ὄνομα Πολυνείκους ἐμοί. Antigone.

[126] See Lloyd's analysis of this speech (1992):87–90.

[127] The insights we are given into the brothers' (especially Eteocles') character and intellect do not necessarily contradict what Oedipus says at the end that it is not reasonable that people would have brought such suffering on themselves without divine interference. But in this play except for the blinding and the curse, Oedipus is innocent. These are the very things his sons blame him for. His self-blinding was foolish and if it did not cause their ill treatment of him, it did give them the opportunity to try to hide him away. A blind man is an easy victim of two strong, sighted sons. His curse has caused them to fear each other. The curse is given by Jocasta as the immediate cause of Polynices' accepting voluntary exile. Teiresias goes deeper into the past to a first cause. But for all the talk of cause and effect, there seems no direct relation between the self-sacrifice of Menoeceus and the outcome of the final battle in which the Thebans drive away the invaders. Causation, as often, is multiple and even at times beyond human grasp.

the Mycenaean spear is certainly an afterthought. His defense of λόγος as being as efficacious as force is a lie since he never has any intention of listening to his brother or mother. It is only efficacious if it has the power to back it up. Justice does not exist among unequals: Eteocles does not say so in so many words, but his mother's answering plea for equality shows that it is on her mind. The argument of Eteocles applies equally to Polynices. His refusal to yield prevents Polynices from yielding. They are caught together in this story, the unyielding universal story of brothers who cannot share or accept less than the lion's share.

Just before he closes his speech, Eteocles gives a military command (522, cf. *Septem*, 675–6). The truce and debate offer the audience the opportunity to consider the impossible possibility that Polynices and the Argives will not attack: the tradition is held in suspense, but really our attention is concentrated on the irreconcilability of the brothers and the inevitability of the known end. Eteocles' acknowledgment of the unacceptability of his own terms—they would not be acceptable to him—puts him in the wrong.[128] Eteocles rejects "equality" as a word and as something existing in fact, in the world. There is nothing equal among men: to have more than one's share is good. The chorus (526–7) recognizes his rhetorical skill: and in a typical utterance of despair over the discrepancy between word and deed deplores the use of fine words to cloak foul deeds.

Unlike the Eteocles of the *Septem* this Eteocles is not defending Thebes, but his regime. In Aeschylus the familial curse is almost neutral, not attached more to either of the brothers. Eteocles, whatever he may have done in the past, is put in the right by the action of the Aeschylean play and all the more by the poetry (the recurrent imagery of the land), by the presence of citizens (men and women and gods), and by his abilities as a leader and a riddle reader. His attitude toward the female in life makes it inevitable (and perhaps not so tragic) that the line of Labdacus-Laius-Oedipus ends here.[129] How this curse manifests itself in the Euripidean play is in the self-

[128] Here he is the Achilles figure, listening to but rejecting the embassy, but a much debased Achilles, or a more rational immoralistic one. Could Achilles be Thrasymachus and still be admired? Eteocles' character suggests the answer.

[129] See Bacon (1964):31, "For the house of Laius the female is destruction." Of course we do not know what happened in the first two plays of the Aeschylean trilogy (nor even whether the sons of Oedipus have an active part in the second play).

delusion of the brothers. Both brothers' actions are finally the same: both endanger the city for the kingship. And in the smaller, mythological picture they endanger the city for the opportunity to destroy each other: the whole family has been reassembled for self-destruction. When they finally do agree to the politically more reasonable and personally more horrific course, to engage in single combat, even that does not put an end to the fighting, any more than Menoeceus' self-sacrifice has an unambiguous effect on the outcome of the war. The war goes on even without the brothers because it has taken on an existence of its own, separate from its cause and its goal. Even leaderless armies can defend and attack. More is at stake for the Thebans and it is not unrealistic that they would not put down their weapons with a hostile army on their land. Thebes can be victorious and free because the sons of Oedipus are dead, and because the Thebans are cleverer than the Argives and because the Thebans cheat. Jocasta's inappropriately democratic (see Lloyd, 90–92) ἰσότης wins in the political outcome (e.g. 1402, 1433, 1454). The tyrant and the would-be tyrant are dead. The armies of citizens fight for the prize (life) and win it without apparent divine interference or prophets' mutterings.

Jocasta's plea is for equality: the goddess Φιλοτιμία is the most wicked and she is unjust. As she often does, Jocasta elevates Eteocles' abstraction to something more personal.[130] Responding to Eteocles' argument that equality exists in name only, Jocasta tries to demonstrate how it does exist outside of the individual and even the state. Weights and measures are an objective equality, not just a **name**. Cycles of nature demonstrate equality: night and day yield to one another. Τὸ πλέον, too, is just a name (553). Equality, like justice, is a social virtue. Ambition is personal and depends on the existence of inequality. Jocasta's speech is surprisingly abstract while maintaining its personal and familial touch. She addresses first Eteocles as is natural since he spoke second and was the more provocative. The brothers in fact hardly address one another. They call each other "this man"[131]

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[130] "Ambition" may be an abstract noun and further a personified abstraction, but it certainly defines Eteocles' driving force. This is hardly an Artemis/Aphrodite debate as in the *Hippolytus*, where Hippolytus is rejecting one universal force in nature and the world in favor of another that he has chosen. Here the goddesses are hardly more than abstract psychopolitical character traits.

[131] Not until his sixth line, the last line of his entrance speech does Eteocles acknowledge the presence of his brother (τόνδ' 451). His attitude clearly prompts Jocasta's

which is common enough, but the only time either uses the other's name is when Eteocles taunts his brother etymologically.

For all the motherly love and maternal epithets and associations, Jocasta answers each son masterfully. First to Eteocles she opposes abstraction to abstraction. He honors τυραννίς which she demotes to mere φιλοτιμία and to which she opposes the more pragmatic ἰσότης which all can share and which—if anything still can—alone could reconcile the brothers. The subject of Polynices' speech had been his share. Jocasta, speaking for him, elevates sharing (a central theme)[132] into a universal principle that governs the risings and settings of the sun and stars which Eteocles evoked in the most passionate part of his speech as well as the most basic elements of human dealings (measuring, weighing, and counting). No one denies that Polynices has been cheated of his share (cf. 80). The theme reaches its climax here in Jocasta's speech. Polynices had harped on it (478, 483, 486). Jocasta puts her younger son's claim into a cosmic and societal perspective with her explanation of the power of Ἰσότης in the world. Polynices repeats his demand twice, only to be rejected by his brother (601, 603). The word μέρος ("share") resurfaces twice more after the catastrophe (1433, 1655). There the impartiality and the shifting of circumstances that "sharing" implies and that Jocasta had talked about are at the forefront. On seeing her sons lying near to death, she embraces them in turn (1433). They have reached an egalitarian mortality. Both together have harvested their father's curse. Both have acted in such a way as to guarantee its fulfillment. But at the last

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retort that he is not looking at a Gorgon's head, but his brother. Polynices: 474 that he was looking out for his own and his brother's (τοῦδε) interest; 477 (τῷδε) on yielding the rule; 479 that he did not act out of enmity towards this man (τῷδε), 487 that he would yield the rule to his brother after his turn (τῷδε). Eteocles: 511 he would be ashamed if his brother (τόνδε) using force of arms should get his way, 514 it would be a disgrace if he should yield his sceptre to his brother (τῷδ') out of fear of the Mycenaean spear, 520 when it is in his power to rule he will not be a slave to his brother (τῷδε), and finally, 523 "I shall not yield my tyranny to this man" (τῷδ'). In the balanced vituperative match they do use the second person pronoun.

[132] μέρος (share) in the *Phoenissae*:

80 πατρῷ' ἀπαιτεῖ σκῆπτρα καὶ μέρη χθονός.
478 ὥστ' αυτός ἄρχειν αὖθις ἀνὰ μέρος λαβὼν
482–3 ἀλλ' ἔχει / τυραννίδ' αὐτὸς καὶ δόμων ἐμῶν μέρος.
486 οἰκεῖν δὲ τὸν ἐμὸν οἶκον ἀνὰ μέρος λαβὼν
541–2 καὶ γὰρ μέτρ' ἀνθρώποισι καὶ μέρη σταθμῶν / Ἰσότης ἔταξε κἀριθμὸν διώρισε
601 δεύτερον δ' ἀπαιτῶ σκῆπτρα καὶ μέρη χθονός
603 τοῦ μέρους ἔχων τὸ πλεῖον;
1433 προσπίτνουσα δ' ἐν μέρει τέκνα
1655 τί πλημμελήσας, τὸ μέρος εἰ μετῆλθε γῆς;

that impartiality is to be denied them by Creon. This is the subject of Antigone's question (1655) when all she wants is for the brothers to be mourned together as they were in *Septem* and to share the small space of ground needed for burial. Creon's action has been given an intellectual refutation already by his sister. Antigone even begs Creon to allow the burial for her mother's sake (1665). Eteocles wins. But where, as his mother had asked him a lifetime ago (548), where is justice?

Jocasta backs up her position with arguments. Eteocles had simply dismissed the definitions (499), his only proof the fact that human beings disagree. The real argument is that power needs no proof.

Before the *agon* there was, if not a chance that one of the brothers might win, at least an assumption made by everyone that either Polynices or Eteocles or even both of them would come out alive. By the end of the taunts there is no such hope. But even before the two brothers go at each other, Jocasta's arguments go so far in equating them that mutual murder becomes the only believable outcome. She turns from her abstract and universalizing philosophical remarks to address her son (559). The one question that must go unanswered is do you choose to be king or to save the city. Eteocles' actions make the answer obvious; he too cannot win. If his brother should win, the city will be destroyed. Having said that to her first son, she need not repeat it to her second: it is condemnation of him as well. To Polynices, on whom she dotes, she is even more mordantly disapproving. She prays (571, as does the chorus, 242) that he will not win, something she cannot say to Eteocles. She still pictures him coming out alive and going home to Argos, even if he is defeated. Jocasta's argument makes both brothers unworthy of victory or even life.

Their own words, finally, make it certain that the story is back on course and they will both die. It is true that (as Craik points out *ad* 603) "each time it is Eteocles who interrupts, and scores a point," but it is Polynices whose final point is the challenge that they meet in battle to kill each other. At the end Polynices is allowed a longer speech, a farewell and a closing impious prayer that he will kill his brother. Eteocles has thoughtlessly (for a cursed man) damned the whole house (624). His brother can still speak of hopes (634), but the hope is to commit fratricide. Eteocles reminds us that his name suits him. It is easy to condemn Eteocles in this play (as it usually is to

condemn Polynices). But how many rulers have the *sophrosune* to lay down the rule for the good of others? In the *agon* the brothers are perfectly matched. At the end of their reunion, the brothers match balanced threats and insults, reaching a kind of equality in shamelessness (590–624) as they will in death.

4. *Violence beyond the Towers*

First Stasimon: Bloody Foundations

"Cadmus came to this land, Cadmus the Tyrian" (638–9). The chorus again goes back to the beginning of Thebes, not to the journey this time but to its end, the founding of the city. Cadmus finds the fertile spot to which he was directed by the oracle to settle and this is exactly where the birth of Dionysus, always present in Theban plays, took place (642–56). In the earlier ode the theatrical god is associated with Apollo, but here with Ares (658). Aside from the gloomy associations, the darker side is glossed over, the terrible birth, the destruction of Semele as well as the more violent aspects of the rituals. The Bacchic dance will return in the final scene, when the devastated Antigone refuses to dance with the other Theban maidens, but instead does a Bacchic dance of death among the cadavers. In the strophe the fertility of the place and the peacefulness of the god are emphasized (651–4).

Cadmus comes once more to the spot but now it has become a place of violence and its fertility turns to more violence and bloodshed (657–75). Violence breeds violence as the serpent's teeth are sown and produce men maddened for self-destruction. They return to earth after killing each other and their blood is said to water the earth (αἵματος δ' ἔδευσε γαῖαν, 674, as will that of Eteocles and Polynices; cf. Amphiareus' victims, 174): the fate of us all, true, but usually there is some time for a life between birth and death. For them the full circle is less than a day, like that of a tragedy. The brothers share the violence (cf. σιδαρόφρων φόνος 672–3) of the Spartoi. Laius had prepared a similarly short life for his son, but like a few of the Sown Men, the infant was spared, only to reach his end on *this* day, rejected by father, sons, and city; cast out once more to die.

The repetitions between strophe and antistrophe are many, having

to do with the movements of Cadmus, with moisture and with the fertility of the land.[133]

The epode goes still further back in time and continues the emphasis on travel in its invocation of Io, the wandering common ancestress of both the chorus and the race of Cadmus, and in calling upon Demeter and her daughter to come to the land. Even fertility goddesses are mixed up with war: the torches of initiates become firebrands of destruction. Fertility, divine commands, and the history of the peoples and the place connect the three stanzas, with different gods in command of each.

This ode prefigures coming violence and blood flowing, seeping into the earth, the return of the earth-born sons to the earth, brothers, more than brothers, hacking each other down. Eteocles has driven his brother out of Thebes. Cadmus like Polynices was an exile, sent to found a new city. Polynices has come to reclaim that city. Whereas according to an oracle Cadmus[134] was to follow a beast to discover the site of the new civilization, his descendant Polynices had to become a beast in order to find a new home, also according to an oracle that is fulfilled as so often in an ordinary way but which also turns out to be disastrous. In the heart of the nascent city is the dragon, the pre-existing fixture of the land to which Cadmus comes, by the will of the god. The permanence of the place is set against change in the forms of mortality and movement from place to place.

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[133] The repeated words and roots in the strophe-antistrophe:

Κάδμος Τύριος (638–9)—Κάδμος ὀλεσίθηρος (663–4)
δίκε (641)—δίκων (668)
(646, 648)—γύας— (669)
(648)—βαθυσπόρους—(669)
μάτηρ (649)—ἀμάτορος (666)
γᾶν (638)—γᾶ (670), γᾷ (673)
ἔμολε (638)—μόλων (662)
χλοηφόρους (647)—χλοερά (660)
ὕδατος (645)—ἔνυδρα (659)

[134] Oracles abound in the *Phoenissae*:

to Cadmus about the foundadon of Thebes
to Cadmus about sowing the teeth
to Laius about the fathering of children
to Adrastus about the marriages of his daughters
  Polynices believes (408–9) that this oracle is what brought him to Argos. He does not claim to understand the oracle, but he says the god called him to his destiny.
to Oedipus about his death
  From Tiresias much Theban lore from the dragon's origins to the final disposition of the descendants of Cadmus. Very little about the immediate perils, however.

Mortal men spring up from the mortal serpent's teeth, but they are—most of them—reunited with the land, becoming permanent, immutable, dead. The dragon's violence lives on in its own descendants and in those of its killer who are now one family.[135]

The founding oracle, the violence of the sown men, the animal associations connect this ode with what has gone before (Jocasta's more prosaic account of the coming of Cadmus, the chorus' own origins and destination, the oracle given to Adrastus) and what will come (the dragon which will claim Menoeceus, the internecine strife that will claim the brothers, has indeed already claimed them). Violence is present whether it is on the surface or not. The dragon is dead but not gone; the Sown Men killed each other, but not all of them.

The epode with its prayer for divine support in the coming war, looks forward most directly to the next episode with its discussion of saving the city through good strategy or perhaps rather good sense. The strategies suggested are simple and though they may[136] be more appropriate to fifth century warfare, the scene has Homeric allusions (715, 724). At the end of the episode (as the chorus does at the end of the stasimon) Eteocles also suggests possible salvation or at least help through divine good will.

Episode Two: Saving Strategies

After the verbal violence and bitterness of the long first episode that brought together mother and sons in a clash that can end only in death, the second episode is a short, practical, and unemotional one in which Creon and Eteocles discuss strategy.[137] Creon's advice postpones the brothers' plans to meet and kill each other, giving Eteocles' work in this episode a more altruistic aspect (marred by his words about his brother at 754–6, if they are genuine). This is a scene of two men from ordinary life, the older giving the younger advice and the younger taking it, an almost idealized father-son scene. Because it treats battle strategy it parallels scenes of the Aeschylean Eteocles and his scout and thus makes direct reference to the *Septem*.

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[135] See Arthur 1977:169.

[136] See Craik *ad* 712–34 and *ad* 692–3.

[137] At the beginning of the scene, Eteocles sends an anonymous servant to get Creon and includes the relationship, "brother of my mother". His purpose in summoning Creon is to talk about both familial and public matters (οἰκεῖα καὶ κοινὰ ... βουλεύματα 692–3).

Among the surprises are these: that Creon and Eteocles should have a discussion at any time; that Creon is the better strategist; that they talk in such detail; that the prisoner of war (possibly a spy sent by Polynices) is mentioned and then dropped. He does not add much but he takes away Eteocles' initiative in sending out spies. A final surprise is Eteocles' last will (whatever parts of it are genuine).

The second episode reactivates scenes from *Septem*, *OT*, and *Antigone*. In *OT*, Oedipus says "I sent Menoeceus' son Creon" (69–71); and comments that his brother-in-law has had more than enough time for the journey (74–5). Creon is expected (impatiently by Oedipus, 73–4). In *Septem*, Eteocles talks about having sent out scouts (36–7) and one arrives immediately afterwards, making it unnecessary even to acknowledge him by saying, "here's the spy I sent."[138] Both parallels show Eteocles' lack of control over affairs in the *Phoenissae*. Oedipus and the Aeschylean Eteocles have themselves sent the spy or Creon and so expect him back with information. Eteocles tells an anonymous (almost non-existent, almost unnecessary) servant to go get Creon. Creon comes along on his own, hunting Eteocles (699, θηρώμενος: as if these bestial terms were a kind of family patois). The order is canceled, but without Eteocles in control. Eteocles is allowed little of the initiative that had been his saving grace in the *Septem*: he was a leader in charge of the armed forces, of the male citizens loyal to him and in facing his brother could almost be said to be doing his duty. No credit goes to this Eteocles from that expedition behind enemy lines. The old slave is on Polynices' side. The intervention of Jocasta serves to reduce the crisis to a family misunderstanding that could be settled by reason. Neither party is willing to be reasonable: tragedy is not to be reduced to cliché. The early decision of the brothers to meet in battle has nothing to do with strategy, but with personal animosity.[139]

It is Creon[140] who takes over the scene by reporting the existence of the captive and giving news of the imminent attack and taking

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[138] See Taplin (1977):137–9.

[139] In the *Septem*, an earlier defender-attacker pair (Hyperbius-Hippomedon) is said to have personal feelings of enmity (509–10), leading up to the Eteocles-Polynices pairing, but here the battle of the two brothers, mutually agreed to in the first episode, contains all the personal hostility the play can muster.

[140] Creon (705) originally suggests turning everything over to the gods. But (and this is a big but) everyone who speaks of it says that Polynices' cause is just and so in a just world might have the gods' favor.

the lead in decisions regarding the conduct of the war. The discussion turns to practical matters. A prisoner[141] has come (ἥκει). It sounds so fortuitous. Perhaps he adds some details (710 πύργοισι, adds another brick to the emphasis on walls and towers; see also 748–9) keeping us in mind of the seven companies so that we can be surprised that the two brothers do not meet at an assigned gate and have not killed each other by the end of the first messenger's speech. Euripides gives us what Aeschylus left out, a lengthy narrative of the duel.

Eteocles is energetic, courageous, but immature. The old/young theme resurfaces. In *Septem* he may be young, but he proves himself in strategy and leadership (working with his men, including the scout, until he accepts that he will face his brother). In the earlier play there is no older man to dampen his fire. But here, each of his suggestions is shown to be thoughtless, whereas in the *Septem*, each of his choices was militarily, morally, and semeiotically brilliant. The army of the Argives is represented as almost a Pan-Hellenic force.[142]

The seven contingents are at the gates (737): we already know the names of the seven captains from the old man and have experienced their marshalling of forces with Antigone from the rooftop. Creon's strategy is given at 745: what he adds is fellow commanders because "one man cannot see everything" (although it happens in the actual battle that Eteocles does at least try to and proves a very perspicacious, successful leader). In one line (750) Eteocles takes care of the monumental shield scene in the *Septem*, but this version is secularized on the level on which the battle is fought, though not, perhaps, in the vaster scope. With the enemy already at the walls he will not waste time on naming all the fighters (751–2). And so, even though we are treated to a second description of the attackers (as in Aeschylus) and for some of them a third narrative of their deaths, we never get anything like a list of the defenders. Eteocles himself will go to each gate, taking the place of the named defenders of the *Septem*. In the end Thebans save Thebes, but no one knows their

[141] See Craik *ad* 708: Σ suggests he means that a spy was captured.

[142] The Thebans should not engage in a pitched battle outside, beyond the ditches because they are vastly outnumbered, not unlike the Trojans with whom there are numerous implicit comparisons. From the fact that they are besieged by a Panhellenic force and all that that entails to the belief that justice is on the side of the attackers and the fact that the aggressors outnumber the defenders substantially. And so with the other suggestions: a night attack is too risky; as for a cavalry attack, the enemy has chariots too.

names. Ἀλλ' εἶμ' ("I shall go" 753), says Eteocles, but he spoils this exit line by continuing with a long speech (or not).[143]

Eteocles' exit speech ties up loose ends, finishes off the family.[144] Creon here serves as the father figure, but he turns out to be a false father and a failed father. Eteocles sees to the fate of Menoeceus by sending him for Teiresias and prepares for the third episode. And finally he returns to where his heart is, to his brother: hatred makes Eteocles irrational.[145] When he thinks of his brother dead it is clear that he knows he will be dead too. His request regarding Antigone's marriage and that to take care of Jocasta assume that Creon and neither Polynices nor Eteocles will be in charge. Jocasta had talked about Oedipus' curse on his sons (67, 69–70); Polynices had brought it up in his defense (to explain why he accepted exile, 474); now Eteocles says "he will kill us with his curses" (765). In his speech, he sees his brother dead, himself dead, and his brother dead and himself not able to deny him burial.[146]

Eteocles then calls to his servants to bring his armor (779–81) becoming for the nonce the Eteocles of the *Septem* (675–6; compare especially ἀμφιβλήματα *Pho.* 779 and προβλήματα *Septem* 676) and at the same time imitating Polynices (781, δίκῃ νικηφόρῳ). Eteocles' gods are Τυραννίς and Εὐλαβεία,[147] "the most useful of the gods."

This is a difficult scene. What does it do? It adds Creon as a

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[143] See Willink (1990):191.

[144] First for his brother: he takes care of him in a prayer to meet his brother in combat and kill him. He shows a proprietorial attitude toward the fatherland as if his brother had no part in it: 756 ὃς ἦλθε πατρίδα πορθήσων ἐμήν. There follows his request to Creon to take care of his sister's marriage (in case anything should happen to him): this would be the end of his duty to her: she would go into Creon's family; and a second request to take care of mother: they both have a duty toward her and she too in the absence (or abdication) of Oedipus would return to her brother's family. But Oedipus *is* still alive and will eventually come to claim his own: what is his own is more misery. We expect it. Eteocles in these two requests is acting as if his father were dead.

[145] The final request presupposes that he will not be there to refuse burial to his brother. Death is to be the reward for whoever tries to tend Polynices' corpse, even if that person turns out to be a φίλος: this too is almost illogical. Who but a φίλος would bury him? There are, of course, his brother's new, exogamic, φίλοι. Is this slip in logic just a dramatic necessity so that matters can be introduced that will come up later? Or is it that the audience simply would not notice it since we expect the brothers to kill each other?

[146] He does not say "if I am victorious" but the less personal "if τἀμά (my side) overcomes (775)."

[147] Eteocles unlike his namesake in the *Septem* has two "she-gods" and does not fear the feminine.

character of some interest and authority with a variety of tasks ahead of him: consulting Teiresias, being father, brother, father-in-law, being in charge in Eteocles' absence. He is left at the play's end with only the last. Eteocles accepts Creon's advice and is somewhat diminished early in the scene when his prerogatives are taken away. And in his exit speech he accepts the possibility that he will fail. The discussion between Creon and Eteocles prepares for the accounts of the battle and contributes to our surprise that the brothers are still alive at the end of the first round. They are kept alive so that Jocasta (and Antigone) can see them die.

The episode contains much internal movement:[148] Creon has gone all over the city and now comes on stage (697), circling the city and reaching its political center. Much of the talk in the episode is about the movement of troops, leading into the next choral song which sings of the choreography of war, the coming of the Sphinx, and various movements within and to Thebes.

Second Stasimon: Ares' Dance

The chorus sings of the confusion of battle, reflecting Eteocles' exit to war, with Ares on both sides, abetted by the brothers' Eris (798). How do you sing a song to Ares?[149] By starting with Dionysus and transferring the potential violence of the revel-band to the war god. Dance and the Bacchic frenzy are reflected by and reflect war and its movements. Kinship of the Labdacids and Ares is indicated in the word "full of struggle" (784, 800) applied to both. The thyrsus-madness (792) in the center inspires both sides. The struggles of war have not the music of the flute to give them order and beauty (785–8). Bacchus is evoked by his loudest name (Bromius, 785). And the image of the dance for the movements of war is compelling and terrible especially after the more peaceful dances in the chorus' projection of itself as chorus at Delphi and in Jocasta's protective dance around her son.

More animals roam in the foliage of Cithaeron, but Artemis' presence and preference makes them beasts for the hunt and kill, rather than beasts that prey on others (801–2). Oedipus' exposure (803–5)

[148] 690 χώρει, 694 μολεῖν, 696 στείχοντα, 697, 699 ἐπῆλθον, 702 μολών, 706 ἥκω, 708 ἥκει, 711 ἐλίξειν, 748 ἐλθών, 753 εἶμι.

[149] On Ares as a unifying theme see Masaracchia (1987): *passim*.

on the same mountain suggests that the beasts should have preyed on him or the elements worked for his death by exposure. Neither nature nor man's cruelty to child, noted through allusion to the social (804, οἴκων) world of civilization and art or craft (805, χρυσοδέτοις περόναις) is effective in ridding the world of the suddenly not so helpless infant, saved by maternal love, but not his own mother's.

The antistrophe is full of life and breeding, but of a hostile, sinister, or monstrous kind, first the natural beasts (801, πολυθηρότα) of the mountain. Then the brood of Jocasta (803, λόχευμ' Ἰοκάστας), the nurturing (cf. 804, θρέψαι) of Oedipus, a monster marred (805, ἐπίσαμον) by prophesy and abuse. Next comes the mountain bred portent (806, οὔρειον τέρας), the Sphinx, which carried off those born of Cadmus (808, Καδμογένη) sent from Hades against the Cadmeans. And again we return to Oedipus and the monstrous brood (811–817, esp. 816, ματρὶ λόχευμα, μίασμά τι πατρός). The strife is a result of the incest (cf. 814) and the Sphinx was the cause of Jocasta's being given as wife to her son. The chorus gives the order of events. We must supply any causal connection. And we can if we fill in from other things said or sung in the play. There is divine hostility, from Ares, from Earth, from Apollo, from Dionysus. It is not explained by Teiresias whose vision, we will see, is narrow and literal and anything but subtle.

The epode teems with yet more images of breeding.[150] Here the result is mixed: the savagery of the dragon and the teeth-bred generation. Even that is κάλλιστον ὄνειδος (821), a glorious shame, to Thebes. On the positive side, the gods came to the wedding of Harmonia (822–3); the walls of Thebes rose to Amphion's lyre (823–4); the plain between the rivers is fertile (825–7); and the horned foremother produced a royal line (826–7). These seem positive, joyous events, but the present has made them all ambiguous. The descendants of Cadmus and Harmonia are full of suffering (800). The plain between Dirce and Ismenus is now full of armed men of more ordinary birth, hostile to Thebes. The very walls are under attack.

The chorus ends with a multivocal summary. One clear theme is change (831, ἑτέροις ἑτέρας μεταμειβομένα). The crowns of the strophe (786) that decorated the heads of young girls in the choral dance have become at the very end of the epode (832) crowns or circlings

[150] 818, ἔτεκες, ἔτεκες; 820, θηροτρόφου; 821, γένναν ὀδοντοφυῆ; 826, χλοεροτρόφον; 828, προμάτωρ; 829 ἐγείνατο.

of Ares (Ἀρηΐοις στεφάνοισιν).[151] Perhaps it means several things. For the chorus cannot know the outcome. Ares' dance is the image that carries through the ode from beginning to end along with the breeding of strife and the ambiguity of good fortune and success and victory. The god who is full of suffering (784) does not suffer himself, but he brings suffering to the human beings who are also called full of suffering (800). It is difficult to tell whether the ode is finally optimistic (as Parry believes) or despairing. It seems most likely that it is equivocal. The crowns they sing of become a visual reality in the form of the crown Teiresias wears, his reward for saving Athens (at the cost of another royal child's life).

The ambiguous portent (821, κάλλιστον ὄνειδος) interestingly called a barbarous rumor (819, βάρβαρον ἀκοάν) which the chorus heard in their foreign home introduces Teiresias' dubious prophecy and more prolix account of the dragon's afterlife. The story is Greek—one of the most defining of the Greek legends—and yet even to foreigners its brutality makes it barbarous.

5. *Past and Present Violence in the Dark Heart of Thebes*

Third Episode (834–1018)

This is the center[152] of the play. Teiresias, blind and weak, enters with his daughter.[153] The departure at the end of the scene will be visually repeated at the end of the drama. He says his piece, argues with Creon and goes off, as does Oedipus with his daughter, who also acts as his eyes.[154] Teiresias goes back to an earlier beginning, the slaying of the dragon; not earlier than Jocasta's first beginning, but shortly after it. Jocasta had begun with the arrival of Cadmus in Thebes; the eternal landscape is there, but she does not dwell on it, preferring to talk about the royal family. Teiresias begins with the

[151] Whatever it means; see Bremer (1980):283–7 and Parry (1967):*passim*; also Mastronarde *ad* 832–3 who agrees with Parry that the meaning is optimistic but allows for a "secondary suggestion of danger."

[152] On the structure see Burian (1981):4 and Foley (1985):108 (and her bibliography) and Willink (1990):186.

[153] The first surprise is that Teiresias comes with his *daughter* (usually he comes on with a boy, a servant or apprentice); most anonymous *and* named children in tragedy are boys.

[154] On these passages see Jouanna (1986):48–50 and (1976):92–6.

changes Cadmus made, the taming of the place which involves the coils of a serpent and layers of violence from the earth: the dragon in its lair, the sown men sprung from the earth at the mythological center of Thebes. Teiresias confirms Jocasta's opinion that the Theban enterprise was doomed from the beginning. The constant dwelling on the past and the dead is characteristic of tragedy in general, but perhaps more so of plays set in Thebes.

This Teiresias makes us wonder if everyone named Teiresias is the same Teiresias. Facts and surprises may tell us something. Euripides can be a "fact bully" at times, slapping us with some obscure ritual, relationship, mythical parergon. But he also plays fast and loose with our expectations.

The cranky Teiresias asks Menoeceus how much further and is answered by Creon. We might assume at this point that Menoeceus is to be a mute character like the blind man's daughter and he does not speak until after the old seer has left (cf. Mastronarde *ad* 845). Creon is jocular and courteous to Teiresias (showing that he is not on edge, something that is most unusual in interviews with the prophet). Teiresias brags about his recent success, so recent that he is still wearing a golden crown (στέφανον, 856, see 832), bestowed as his reward. Creon takes the crown as a good omen (858), not knowing what it cost the Athenians and what this little consultation with Teiresias will cost him. One need not wonder if Teiresias will get a crown this time. It is as if Teiresias knows only one answer. His confidence is either comic or appalling when he states as a fact καλλινίκους Κεκροπίδας ἔθηκ' ἐγώ (855). Glorious victory[155] is a recur-

[155] καλλίνικος in the *Phoenissae*:

858	καλλίνικα, Creon accepts Tiresias' success in Athens and his crown as a good omen
Cf. 1048,	καλλίνικος ὤν of Oedipus' victory over the riddles of the Sphinx which led to his polluting the city by marrying his mother.
1059,	on Menoeceus' self-sacrifice to make the city of Thebes victorious. This is his purpose, but the effect of his sacrifice is far from clear and the facts that it is an analogue to the defeat of the Sphinx and that Menoeceus is compared to the young men who were swept away by the Sphinx make it all the more ambiguous.
1253,	on the remarks made by their partisans to the brothers before their hand-to-hand combat, this one to Eteocles, if he is victorious he will retain his rule. And he will kill his brother.
1374,	Eteocles prays that his spear will be victorious and kill his brother. Polynices had already prayed to Hera that his right hand be victorious (1368, νικηφόρον) after he has killed his brother.
1729,	Oedipus on his own victory over the Sphinx.

rent theme in the *Phoenissae* and as usual in Euripides (in *Medea*, *Heracles*, *Electra*, for example) it has ironic undertones.

Among the surprises[156] is the fact that all three actors are present, but none of the major characters (not that there are any really larger than life figures in this play). The scene includes no members of Laius' family (or even of Oedipus' immediate family).

Creon is the statesman, more fully than in *OT*, concerned about the πόλις, but he consults Teiresias at the request of Eteocles, who has sent for the seer and brought Menoeceus into the drama, thus in his turn diminishing the efficacy of Creon. The paradigm is *OT* in which Oedipus anticipates every action and explains or invents every motive. Here responsibility is dissipated.

After his prophecy of mutual slaughter this paragon of prophets goes into his command mode: you must sacrifice your child. It will be (918–919) evil to you, but salvation for the πατρίς. Creon had been the only adult free man interested in the city (cf. 898) and now even he, the non-despotic statesman, can follow his nephew's lead in saying χαιρέτω πόλις (919, cf. ἐρρέτω πρόπας δόμος, 624). He is not willing to kill his son, obviously a much loved son, for the city. Teiresias had at first refused to tell this horrible news, agreeing to suffer whatever the city would suffer. But when Creon tries to reject it, he threatens to make it public.[157] What happened to his obligatory fear for his safety? What craft does it take to tell a man to kill his child?[158] Any sane man would refuse (as Creon does). If things go wrong for the city in the coming war the seer can say "I told you so." Now Teiresias mocks Creon (920 ἀνὴρ ὅδ' οὐκέθ αὑτός).

Teiresias comes up with an explanation and it is accepted by Menoeceus: the Sown Men are to be wiped out too (most of them have already died or intermarried) along with the descendants of Laius. Teiresias' rationalization for the shedding of innocent blood in addition to the heaps of corpses he has already predicted, which

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[156] There is yet another surprise if we remember *Antigone*: in this play Jocasta reared Creon's children, because their mother died long ago; if we are expecting this play to be like the *Antigone*, Euripides here warns us not to. There will be no suicide of Creon's wife to mourn her son. Instead Jocasta will die in despair after the loss of hers.

[157] This would explain (although in truth such explanations are hardly necessary in ancient drama) how the purpose of Menoeceus' act is public knowledge by the end of the third stasimon.

[158] Note the modal ambiguity: the potential optative "might save" or "could save" (948) is not in keeping with his certainty that he saved Athens by his prophecy.

he calls an ἀγὼν λόγων (inaccurately, since Creon does not have a chance to argue with him, 930), complements words of the chorus in the first stasimon where they told of the coming of Cadmus to look for lustral water when he slew the dragon. Ares apparently will not receive enough human blood in the coming slaughter (933–5) but will only be appeased by the death of an innocent boy. The earth too demands blood for the blood of the sown men. Only Menoeceus is suitable and Teiresias goes so far as to make him a little less human by calling him a free-roaming colt (947).[159]

Here at the center of the play comes a revelation of mixed darkness and clarity. Thebes, like Delphi, has its center, the den of the dragon, bestialized by the words θαλάμαις and σηκός.[160] To reach it Menoeceus will go to the highest defenses, like Ares crowns (ἄκρων 1009, cf. ἄκροις 831; 1091).[161] The darkness of the dragon's lair suggests irrational terrors, monstrous imaginings, such things as have plagued Thebes since its founding. Menoeceus leaves to die, confident that he is saving the city, 1014), optimistically praising patriotism and good citizenship, individuals working, each in his own way as opportunity affords, for the good of the state (1015–18). He will win Ares' good will and a crown for his bravery. But his stage life is lived between two choral odes on war and monsters bred in the earth from whom he himself is descended. The rational way of good people working for the common good is not the way in Thebes, a city sick with selfish men and greedy monsters and vengeful, bloodthirsty gods.

This scene is a surprise in a play that is full of surprises. Why is it here? Several answers suggest themselves. What is a Theban play without Teiresias? It turns the focus to Creon and gives him a reason for being in the play. It shows the cruel effect of the brothers' selfishness through the contrast with this noble youth who deceives his father from a simple motive.[162] It answers the question, what

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[159] On the ritual significance see Mastronarde *ad* 947.

[160] The place of Menoeceus' sacrifice is (931) "in the dens (θαλάμαις) where the earthborn dragon was born, watcher of Dirce's streams." Menoeceus calls it (1010–11) σηκὸν ἐς μελαμβαθῆ δράκοντος ("the dark deep enclosure or den of the dragon"). Teiresias goes back to an earlier beginning. It is not just Laius who made the city diseased, nor his polluted child, and cursed grandchildren, but as far back as the slaying of the dragon of Ares, the people of Cadmus have been haunted. Now Ares and Earth demand their own back and no one is safe.

[161] On Euripides' change in the location of the dragon's lair, see Vian (1963):84.

[162] In the recent literature see Sansone (1991):166–7; O'Connor-Visser (1987):83,

happened to Creon's other son for those who remember *Antigone*. Self-sacrifice is a favorite dramaturgical theme of Euripides, early and late. That the past is alive and at work in the present, not in the methodical way of Sophocles, but in a more brutal and irrational way is shown in this scene more than any other.[163] It provides a reason for the chorus' haunting ode of mourning for the youthful victims of the Sphinx before more young men are slaughtered. It takes us into the real heart of Thebes before the armies clash at the towers and outside on the plain. It is part of the founding myth and the cost of civilization theme. It spreads responsibility for the favorable outcome of the war and it spreads the misery. Finally, it contributes to the feeling that whatever is at work here is not order, but the chaos of undoing order.

Third Stasimon (1019–66): the Sphinx's victims

The lamentation for the young men who were victims of the Sphinx describes the historic lament and repeats it by making wailing sounds and is in turn a lament for the latest victim, an unwed youth like those the Sphinx devoured (ἰηιήιον βοάν, ἰηιήιον μέλος, 1036–7).[164] This song about the Sphinx continues the theme of freakishness that plagues Thebes.

Ares has demanded (through Teiresias his spokesman, a novel role for Apollo's seer) as his compensation for the dragon the last of the dragon's offspring, the gentlest and the best. Menoeceus dies before the war but his death has no clear effect on the battle which has its own natural back and forth rhythm of men fighting for the walls.

The choral singers are not mothers and so do not realize the sorrow they would feel to lose such a son, and they forget that this boy is

87. Rabinowitz (1993):64–6 tries to find differences between the sacrifice of the male Menoeceus and those of females in other plays. Unfortunately she has read into Menoeceus' sacrifice a number of facts that are not there and this seems to lessen the contrast. For example, he is not in line to become king and would have little reason to expect that he would ever be king; he is not a descendant of Laius (64); and he does think about his reputation (at lines 1005–6, see Rabinowitz 65). He dies for himself as she says (65), but he also dies for Thebes, for his father and brother (1003), and for a dead snake.

[163] On the disconnectedness of events in Euripides, see Thalmann (1993), esp. 130, 155. On the uncertainty of the efficacy of Menoeceus' sacrifice, see Foley (1985):109.

[164] This would explain why mothers and girls (prospective brides), but not wives, took part in the keening (1033–4; cf. Goff 140).

no joy to his mother who died long ago (1060–1). Creon bears the loss alone. Jocasta whose sons are no paragons feels the pain of their loss and can no longer live with them dead. Mothers weep. The chorus sings of past deaths caused by the Sphinx, of the present plunge of Menoeceus, a great victory, a great sorrow, and of the coming deaths of the sons of the land, of Polynices and Eteocles and of ten thousand anonymous children of anonymous parents. Oedipus' victory brought sorrow, what is the meaning of Menoeceus' victory which is compared to it?[165] It, too, is the middle and the beginning of many sorrows. The messenger begins with it and so does Creon when he returns with his son's broken body, a flashback to his role in *Antigone*.

Fourth Episode 1067–1283: First Battles

The chorus ends with doom (ἄτα, 1066). The messenger enters with a cry of alarm (ὠή 1067, repeated 1069), bringing the newest ἄτη. The messenger calls at the palace to report to Jocasta, (who wants to hear the news, 1088–9, so that she can report it to the blind old man in the house), not to Creon (1068) nor to Oedipus. Jocasta's questions are like those of Atossa in *Persae*. She spends four or five lines with the question Atossa had put so simply and affectingly, "who is not dead?" Only after she knows that her son is alive does she ask about the city, about the walls and towers (1078, ἑπτάπυργοι ... περιβολαί). And once she has established that the city is unharmed, she can bring herself to ask about Polynices (1083). The personal aspect overwhelms the political, in Jocasta's mind, in the action taken by the brothers, and in the order of her questions. The order of her questions is significant. She is reluctant to ask about the son who is attacking the city and she cannot even be sure that the messenger will know his fate. As it turns out he could hardly have missed it.[166]

Beginning with Creon's son's effort to save the city (1091–2), the stress is on the towers (1078, 1087, 1091, 1094, 1097, 1098, 1103) and the names of the gates are given. These three lines (1090–2) are

[165] Cf. 1048 καλλίνικος, Oedipus; 1059 καλλίνικα, Menoeceus.

[166] Jocasta asks about the sons one by one. The messenger answers about Eteocles, ζῇ ("he's alive" 1077). But when asked about Polynices he says ζῇ σοι ξυνωρὶς ... τέκνων (1085), ominously linking the sons as a pair as they are elsewhere in the play (327 and in their death and dead scenes). Teiresias has predicted their mutual slaughter. The sons can not live separately any more than they could live together.

all there is about Menoeceus' heroism; not even his name is given, though his act is called τῆδε γῇ σωτήριον.

The first messenger's first speech shows how the contingents (stationed according to Creon's advice) looked at the beginning, all in order. But the description is presented to Jocasta, not to Eteocles as it had been in *Septem*. The messenger had gone to each of the ποιμέσιν λόχων (1140, "shepherds of the contingents) and so was able to see each device and know where each was attacking. What is missing is the answer to each riddle, to be supplied by the post-modern (or post-Aeschylean) active audience.[167] It is not left to Eteocles.

There are some interesting syntactical strategies in the first speech. "Creon's son who died for the land" (Κρέοντος παῖς ὁ γῆς ὑπερθανών) is also παῖς ὁ γῆς (1090, "child of the land"): like all the Sown Men, he is a son of the earth. Eteocles' strategic activities are made subordinate to Menoeceus' salvific act. The walls and towers and gates are made prominent. First Menoeceus kills himself at the topmost towers (1091 πύργων ἐπ' ἄκρων); at 1094 Eteocles assigns the seven companies at the seven gates (πύλας ἐφ' ἑπτά); and he goes around to troubled areas of the wall (1097 ὡς τῷ νοσοῦντι τειχέων), allowing the messenger who went with him a good view (1098 περγάμων δ' ἀπ' ὀρθίων).[168] The hostile army approaches the ἄστυ (1101). The trumpets sound ἐκ τειχέων (1103). Then the narrator enumerates the gates, again stressing the structures more than the men, by beginning with the names of the gates in most instances (in *Septem* the order of name-gate or gate-name varies): "At the Neitan gate (1104) . . . to the Proitidan gate (1109) . . . to the Ogygian gate (1113) . . . before the Homoloid gate (1119) . . ." When he gets to the fifth gate, he interlocks Polynices with the name of the gate (1124). Only Capaneus is named before his gate, the Electra (1129). And at the Seventh, Adrastus (1134), again trapped between the words for the gate. The attackers have been characterized as monstrous, like earthborn giants, but the Thebans turn out to be no less so. The one Theban named in the battle scene is of divine parentage and is able to lift a stone the size of a wagon (1157–8). But more than the men at the towers, the walls and towers themselves seem to attack the attackers.

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[167] Goff (1988):*passim* treats this admirably; see also Craik's notes.

[168] Who is thus able to overcome, as deJong (1991:11–12, 25–26) points out, the messenger's limitations of place and access. I do not agree with her, however, that the messenger at 1238–9 is merely reporting other characters' perceptions, but that he says these words to indicate what he himself does *not* think.

The stones hurled from them are pieces of the earthworks. The "Argives" attack the walls but the walls hold out. Parthenopaeus comes raging at the towers and the city rages back at him. A huge stone crushes his blond curls (noticed by Antigone) and his beard that is just darkening his cheek (1160, cf. *Septem* 534). Adrastus halts his men after the striking of Capaneus,[169] leaving them easy victims for the Theban charge. What happened to each of the other leaders is left out. Corpses upon corpses are left by both sides, but the towers still stand unbreached: ἑπτάπυργοι ... ἑστᾶσ' ἄθραυστοι (1078–9) and πύργων μὲν οὖν γῆς ἔσχομεν κατασκαφὰς/ἐς τὴν παροῦσαν ἡμέραν (1196–7). The messenger ends with a piece of conventional (but no less sincere for being trite) piety, to which Jocasta replies in kind (1197–9, 1202). Naturally she is happy that the city is safe and both her sons alive. Even to a person living the myth and not knowing its completeness, that must have been a surprise.

But like everything else in this play, military success comes at a price that makes it less clear, less worthy of the crown of glorious victory.

The messenger goes on too long about good and bad news, as if one could end the story somewhere else, at a good part, and the rest would not happen (have happened). But that would not be the story of the sons of Oedipus. Tragedy sometimes begins but rarely ends at a good part. It must go on. It cannot end, like an *agon*, with a stand-off. Change is crucial. Change for whom? In this play, as often, the change, brought on by the murderous hate that brings about the disaster, affects all the named characters (that is why they have names to be remembered). The sons of Oedipus will be dead and so equal. Eteocles will fall from his monarchy in which he put so much stock, for which he was willing to sacrifice his family, his state, and himself. The exile Polynices will die at home, suffering a change from bad fortune to worse; at least he had his deceptive but pleasurable hopes (399) before he came home. Jocasta, the mother and mediator, will be childless of her sons and will kill herself. She dies embracing them, surrounding them. Antigone, the sister and bride-to-be, will have neither brothers nor husband, nor home nor city. Creon will lose his son and his good sense. And finally a blind and tattered Oedipus will lose the dark cell where he has been hidden for a wider dark-

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[169] Only Parthenopaeus and Capaneus (and Hippomedon, 1118) of the named victims are undoubtedly dead at the end of the first battle.

ness, exile, poverty, privation, and homelessness. Even he can recognize suffering worse than his confinement. There awaits him the insecurity of wandering in exile and of being seen. Only Antigone is left to him. He has seen to the deaths of sons and father, mother and wife. That he can stand and rage is a tribute to the human spirit.

Even the messengers are affected by the tragedy. The reluctance of the first messenger shows that even though he has no other reason for being than to introduce the story of the single combat, he will never be the same again. Not only must he tell it to Jocasta, but he himself, the man closest to Eteocles is deeply shocked by the imminent fratricide. The messenger characterizes the action as most shameful, as something that should not even be said. He speaks with his own voice as messengers often do. The Argives and Cadmeans all shout their approval, as though thinking it right, he adds (1239, ὡς δίκαι' ἡγούμενοι). In other circumstances (as in the *Iliad*) a single combat between the two interested parties is the most reasonable solution. Reason cannot prevail too soon. Here it is shocking because they are brothers, but it is shocking only to their loved ones, not to the nameless recruits. The messenger's horror is magnified by the fact that he is speaking to the men's mother.

The brothers go through a ritual arming by their next in command (1245), reminiscent of the arming on stage of Eteocles in *Septem*. They stand shining in their armor like the armies seen by Antigone at the beginning. Now it is only two men, ready to kill each other. They are encouraged by their friends through fine details of the private and public conversation. "Fighting for the πόλις" has taken on a new and realistic meaning: fighting to possess it, not to save it. Polynices would give a glorious reputation to Argos. Eteocles would keep the sceptre. The seers are said to be looking for a sign of victory or of men being defeated: what did they see? What use was it? We already know what the maestro of prophets has said (880, ἐγγὺς δὲ θάνατος **αὐτόχειρ** αὐτοῖς). The messenger surmises that Jocasta will be deprived of both her sons on this day (1261–2). And so he would surmise that the seers see both victory and defeated men. It may be that the abstractness of victory is being established. What is victory in this war in the face of the bodies (whether the two who will be brought back or the heaps upon heaps that are not seen)?

In calling Antigone, as Craik notes (*ad* 1264), emphasis is placed once again on Jocasta's maternal role in the repeated use of τέκνον (as with her sons). Jocasta will die with her two sons if they are too

late. Of course they will be too late. Another attempt at reconciliation is redundant. Jocasta has done all she can. In murder, in war, no one is safe, no one can remain innocent. The chorus' experience as captive exiles, as mourners, as no longer sheltered maidens foreshadows Antigone's.

The bringing together of all these people, how they come to share the same stage at the same time or in succession is carefully worked out and told or enacted. Jocasta at this time and place ought to be dead, but without her nothing would unify the stage characters.[170] She is mother to three of them, foster mother and aunt to one, sister to another, and wife and mother to the last. It is she who arranged the truce and allowed Antigone to look out at the armies, having sent with her the servant who brought Polynices the terms of the truce. She is in control of the family, at least as far as mutual civilities go. The chorus' presence represents the past history of Oedipus' family. Not Jocasta, but fraternal strife has kept the chorus here. Their coming has its causes far removed from present day Thebes. Jocasta's control over the situation, dramatic or political, ends with the deterioration of the *agon* into threat and vituperation. Jocasta, despite her winning, but ineffectual, argument, can only retire into her palace and await the tragedy she has tried to avert. When she leaves at the end of this scene, we know she will not come back alive.

Fourth Stasimon (1284–1306)

The last stasimon is sad and short and full of repetitions.[171] The mother named in the strophe is replaced by the Erinyes (of the father) in the antistrophe. The boys (1289) of the strophe are replaced

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[170] Said adds Creon (1985:510). Together Jocasta and Creon "incarnent également l'amour des enfants."

[171] Repeated words in the fourth stasimon:

Repetitions in the strophe:
1284 αἰαῖ αἰαῖ
1285 τρομερὰν τρομεράν
1287 ἔλεος ἔλεος
1288–9 πότερος πότερον
1289, 1293 αἱμάξει, αἱμάτων
1290 ἰώ ἰώ ἰώ
1291 ὁμογενῆ ὁμογενῆ
1292 δι' δι'
1293 τάλαιν' τάλαινα
1294–5 πότερον (1289) The urgency of which brother?

in the antistrophe by two beasts (1297). The singular verb (1289) by the dual (1299, 1300). The single corpse (1295) of the strophe has become plural (1303) in the antistrophe, death more violent and inevitable and plural.

The chorus' fear and pity is for the mother (1285–7). Which will they bewail? they ask, as if one of the brothers could survive (1295). But their own grammar in the antistrophe gives the lie to that notion. Repeated expressions of horror (1285) and pity (1287), of kinship (1289, 1291) and blood and violence (1289, 1293, 1297, 1304) review the themes of the play, now reduced to the simplicity and universality of death and to the repetitive ritual of lament.

6. *Full Circle: Ares' Crowns*

Exodos (1307–1766)

An unhappy Creon enters unsure whether to lament his own or his city's woes, keeping up the blurring of πόλις/οἶκος. Of course he does not yet have the full tally of his personal dead. But here is the beginning of the chaos of mourning with which the play is to end. He speaks of the cloud surrounding the city helping us to see the hellish quality of light (1311–12), reminding us of the lurid light at the beginning, the dawn light blazing with weapons. Now it is dark with the dust of battle and with death (as his reference to the gloom of Acheron suggests). We of course know where his sister whose help he is seeking has gone and what she will do/has already done. Threats made on the tragic stage rarely go unfulfilled. And the chorus believes that the sons of Oedipus are dead (1330–1). Creon is to be the recipient of all this woe: there is no one else left. Oedipus is saved

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Repetitions in the antistrophe:
- 1296 φεῦ δᾶ φεῦ δᾶ
- 1299 πέσεα πέσεα
- 1305 ἄποτμος ἄποτμος
- 1304, 1306, 1297 φόνου, φόνος, φόνιαι

Words from Strophe reused in Antistrophe
- 1285, 1300 φρέν' ἔχω—ἐπὶ φρέν' ἠλθέτην
- 1289, 1297 δίδυμα τέκεα—δίδυμοι θῆρες
- 1289, 1299 (1293) αἱμάξει—αὐτίχ' αἱμάχετον (αἱμάτων)
- 1291, 1297 ὁμογενῆ ψυχάν—φόνιαι ψυχαί
- 1294, 1300 τάλαιν' ἐγὼ τάλαινα—τάλανες
- 1295, 1301 ἰαχήσω—ἰαχάν
- 1295, 1303 νέκυν—νεκροῖς

for a more effective scene. Creon here begins to resemble the Creon of *Antigone* (though earlier he had rejected that role in his vain attempt to save his child), with the dead body of his son, hearing the news of his sister's death, broken at last. But he rallies to become more like the Creon at the end of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Jocasta's death reminds Creon of her marriage (in which he played his part), of the Sphinx's riddles and the curse of Oedipus (1355), reviewing high points of the past and bringing about a premature sense of closure for Creon, but it is not over yet. This time the wailing of the chorus is stronger, the hope is gone, the mourning like that of earlier crises.

Both brothers in the narration pray not so much for victory as to kill the other and both prayers are, of course, answered. Rituals of battle continue to make the event special and to delay the anticipated description that is like much in the genre of horror story, both appalling and appealing: the torch is hurled, the trumpet is sounded. Dramatic gestures try to give respectability and grandeur to this repulsive spectacle. In an epic simile the brothers are like raging wild boars. Polynices, the boar of the oracle, and his brother are hardly distinguishable. And their beards are actually covered with foam. Their impatient, savage, inhuman violence is stressed. And their likeness to each other is complete.[172] They watch each other's eyes. Even the blows are perfectly balanced. Their prayers differ only in the goddesses addressed: they pray to "kill my brother and win." But the emphasis is on the first part; the second, to reclaim home or to retain the throne is all but forgotten. Equal blows, equal wounds are described. Eteocles is ahead for a moment.

Eteocles plunders his brother's body and is killed; and the chorus says "alas for Oedipus" (1425). Such transference is common. Whose woes? In this incestuous family the troubles are indiscriminate; no

[172] The likeness is stressed:

1402 ἐξ ἴσου δ᾿ Ἄρης / ἦν
1343 ὁμοίαις συμφοραῖς
1353 δυστύχων παίδων φόνος
1362 δισσὼ στρατηγώ
1365–8, 1373–6 similar prayers
1422–4 togetherness in death
1433 ἐν μέρει
1436–7 use of the dual
1454 ἄμφω δ᾿ ἅμ᾿ ἐξέπνευσαν ἄθλιον βίον
1459 περιβαλοῦσ᾿ ἀμφοῖν χέρας.

one can say that the ills of one are separate from those of the others. That may be true of any family, but it is exaggerated here. The messenger brings another set of misfortunes: the arrival of Jocasta too late. Again the stress is on the equality of the two brothers: Eteocles' **look** of love at his mother; Polynices' words of pity for all his family, even for his brother. The φίλος/ἐχθρός equation is the heart of all tragic literature. In the final equality of the brothers there is reminiscence of *Septem*, that each would have so much of his country as suffices for burial. Both at the same time breathed their last breaths 1454) at which Jocasta thrust the sword through the middle of her neck (1457–8). Probably it is the sword that Eteocles threw down when he set to stripping his brother.

The final battle is won by the Thebans because they kept their armor on and surprised the Argives creating a plain of death (1470–2) and a less ambiguous (but not aristocratic) victory (1478–9).

With the tale of the second messenger, the entrance of Antigone with her dead, and the pitiful Oedipus, the play becomes more and more of a dirge. It ends in the chaos of inarticulate mourning like the *Persians*. Here we have not the fall of an empire but the death of a great family that has been an institution for five generations. The individuals and their deaths are left behind for the general slaughter and the driving away of the Argive army, one of Ares' rings surrounding the city. Creon is left standing there and Antigone comes on with the bodies of her dead carried behind her. She talks in detail of her appearance as Jocasta had done in her monody of welcome to Polynices. She, too, does a dance around the figures (1489). Jocasta is back among the dead where our expectations (since Homer) would have placed her. The symmetry of the *Septem* is both broken and affirmed. Jocasta forms a third, asymmetrical element, but links the two brothers in her embrace and her motherhood. Polynices is once more called ἐπώνυμος (1495). Only he is called by name, but Eteocles is included in his sister's wild lament. Her dirge is for the destruction of the house of Oedipus (1495–7, 1504).

Calling Oedipus is another reminiscence of Jocasta's scene of welcome to Polynices as Antigone pictures Oedipus wandering blindly about his enclosure. Oedipus, long awaited, emerges with his cane from his dark chambers. What will he be like after his years in the dark: a grey indistinct image of air (1543); a corpse from below (1544); a fleeting dream (1545)? He is all these, but more.

In the **prologue** Jocasta told his story and how he got his name;

the adoption, the abortive trip to the oracle, the murder, the Sphinx, the marriage, the blinding, the confinement, the rage. She refers to him as her son over and over again.[173]

In the **first episode** Jocasta's monody included a long (327–36) description of the blind old man in the halls. We must not be allowed to forget that he is there. Each reminder brings him closer. What characterizes him is darkness and the heart-broken moaning of despair and pain.

Oedipus is mentioned, to be dismissed, in the **second episode** by Eteocles when he is making his instructions concerning the disposition of his kin. "Father brings on himself the charge of foolishness, for blinding himself; I do not have much respect for him. He will kill us with his curses if that's what happens." The chorus, lamenting Ares and Eris deplores the saving of Oedipus in the **second stasimon**, βρέφος ἔκβολον οἴκων ("the infant cast out of the house"). They lament the coming of the Sphinx but do not mention Oedipus' solving the riddle. Teiresias in the **third episode** tells how Oedipus was brutalized by his sons, ἄνδρα δυστυχῆ ἐξηγρίωσιν . . . 874–879 ("they brutalized a man of misfortune"). And he suggests that (876–8) τῶν Οἰδίπου μηδένα ("none of those born of Oedipus") be citizen or ruler of the land. At last the chorus celebrates Oedipus' victory over the Sphinx in the haunting **third stasimon** (1042ff.). He is being kept alive and in mind by art.

Finally in the **exodos** the pitiful old man comes out. This scene has been criticized since the beginning,[174] but the appearance of the famous Oedipus is what we have all been waiting for. The final disintegration of the story into the chaos of lamentation (and inaction) is perhaps not as successful as in some other plays, no doubt because it is so confusing. But here is the meaning of what we have seen, if anywhere. Even the lament breaks down in non-sequiturs (after 1725).

What happens in this scene? It is a reunion of the dead and living; it extends the parts of Creon and Antigone; it gets rid of Oedipus for the survival of Thebes. He is disposed of as everyone else had been and as he himself had been as a new-born infant. Creon, of course, is left behind. What about Antigone? Her future life is in

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[173] 30 τὸν ἐμὸν ὠδίνων πόνον; 33 παῖς οὑμὸς; 44 παῖς πατέρα καίνει; 50 ἐμὸς παῖς Οἰδίπους; 54 ἡ τεκοῦσα παιδί; 55 τίκτω δὲ παῖδας παιδί.

[174] But for more positive treatment see Mastronarde's (1994) commentary *ad loc.* and Cerbo (1989):67–75.

doubt. One thing is certain: there is no future for her in Thebes.

In the exodos Oedipus reviews his famous past, almost as if he flashes back into another play, in one final displacement.[175] *Moira* made him the most wretched of men: while he was still unborn, Apollo's oracle foretold that he would kill his father (1595–99); his own father tried to kill him (1600–1); he served as a slave at the house of Polybus (1606–7); he killed his father and lay with his mother and fathered sons who were his brothers and caused their death (1608–10); the curse was passed (1611); the gods' hand was at work in all this (1612–14). Now his exile is death (1621). But at the end of all his sorrows, he is still a man, a great ragged survivor and he will not betray his humanity by begging (1623–4).

Place becomes prominent once more in the *exodos*, preparation for the final displacement: first the house and specific places in the house (1480–1, 1500, 1530–1, 1536, 1538, 1541, 1627, 1636, 1660, 1744) and then the city (or land) and specific places in and around Thebes (1589, 1591, 1594, 1605, 1621, 1628–30, 1644, 1651, 1655, 1682, 1724, 1735, 1738, 1751, 1761). Two of these passages are particularly pathetic, the first when Antigone gives specificity to the place of her brothers' fatal duel which had just been called "the space between the armies" (μέσον) in the messenger's speech. Now Antigone puts it near the Electran gate (where Capaneus had been attacking just before he was killed and so just before Adrastus called a cease-fire) in a *meadow* (the usual place for exposure of infants) where lotus grows (1570). The second is when Oedipus predicts his death in Athens and Antigone asks what *tower* of Attica will receive him (1705–6), as if Athens were another Thebes.

* * *

The crowns, the rings, the circles of Ares close in until there is nothing left but strangulating death. Death in the neck by the sword; death in the navel, the center of the body, that connects the child to the mother, also the center of the world to which the chorus will go (237); death in the liver, the center of the emotions; a second death in the neck with a sword: Jocasta's death repeats that of Menoeceus, a heroic death; a man's death for the πόλις; a woman's death for

[175] See Jouanna (1976:Texte):83–4 on the actor in this scene pointing to himself and saying "I who played Oedipus."

her children (but her death is for their death, his is for the life of Thebes). And yet Jocasta's death is a footnote to the theme of the freeing of the city from the oppressive curse of Laius' son, while Menoeceus' takes him to the black center of the founding of the city, the confinement of the dragon's den. Whose work saves the city? Menoeceus'? We hope his death was not in vain (but what of the unnamed dead on the plain?). More clearly the brothers' self/other slaughter frees the city from their peculiar self-obsessions and contagious self-destructiveness. Jocasta's death is for herself, the end to the horror story of her life from the time she was a παρθένος given by her father to the brutal Laius and later a childless widow given by her brother to Oedipus, her own son.

The armies surround the city, the walls surround the citizens, the palace walls encircle the family. At the center of the city is the den, Cadmus' eden, snake infested. Two centers then: the den, the palace. The palace is emptied and opens out. Everyone leaves, no one returns. Its enclosures, its dark hiding places are exposed and opened and emptied. Oedipus, like Menoeceus, is at the center, both are hidden in darkness, both finally liberated, obliterated. Layer by layer the city is freed. The army of foreigners is routed. The dragon at the deep center is appeased. The palace at the heart of the city is emptied. But the walls and towers and gates remain, a crown of Ares with a changed fortune. What is stable then? Only the walls and the Thebans (of mixed blood) who win the war. The tragedy is that there is nothing we care about left in Thebes. Even the chorus will go to the real center of life and ritual, earth's navel. The city is saved, yes, but its survival into the next generation is not a matter of interest.

Rings, circles, crowns; centers, dens, chambers, navels, hearts: the play is full of these things.[176] Jocasta dances around her son; she dies encircling her dead; Creon embraces his lifeless son; Antigone dances, a bacchant of the dead whirling around the bodies of her mother and brothers; Oedipus stumbles around his dead. The anular construction of the play has Menoeceus in the center and Oedipus' fate at the two ends, with the brothers two *agones* (one of words, one of swords) forming a middle circle. Thebes still stands at the end with its surrounding walls: it *is*, finally, the crown of Ares. There are layers and layers of enclosures. Menoeceus is called to return to the hole

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[176] Compounds of περι- abound as well: 189, 209, 223, 276, 316, 494, 551, 651, 698, 710, 733, 1078, 1157, 1311, 1357, 1453, 1459, 1667.

where it all began, the serpent's lair, where Cadmus won his crown of victory, preserved for the last of the Sown Men. Oedipus, enclosed in a chamber and then summoned finally into the light, talks about himself still unborn, cursed already in the darkness of his mother's womb before his traumatic birth, the piercing of his ankles and the attempted disposal of him.

The play begins and ends with the story of Oedipus. His birth and death surround the activities of his daughter and she in turn encircles her mother's attempts to save her sons. Jocasta's actions surround those of her sons and they by words and deeds enfold the scenes in which Creon makes his efforts for his city and his son. In the center is the story of Menoeceus: a new chapter for this story. At the end the living and the dead are reunited for the farewells in linked groups of two or three.[177] There are rings within rings, forming a chain which is also Ares' crown: women and men with stories to tell and be told.

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[177] Three dead, three living; the three children of Oedipus; three old, three young; sister and brother; two old men; father and daughter.

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EPILOGUE

"WITHOUT IDEALS OR VIOLENCE"[1]

There are times in life when people/characters look at their lives as complete. Who is the happiest human? Count no one happy until. . . . Such times are frequent in tragedy. At the end of a decisive action the beginning is reviewed. Alcestis does this. She sees her life as a whole. In the play there is a progression of what is revealed about her: first we are told of her activities and then of her decision. She sees her perfection as the boast of others. The perfection is there in her mind until she envisions a future without herself. The imaginary other woman is invented and rejected by Alcestis. She sees the spaces she will leave behind. Like Achilles she mourns for herself while she is still alive and mourns in sympathy with those who will mourn for her. She and Admetus collaborate in the creation of each other. He is diminished by his own action and by contrast with hers. She makes him better. Heracles tells Admetus to treat strangers better (1148). Alcestis at that time is the stranger.

The *Alcestis* shows two people who are artists, creating and defining each other. Both are rewarded at the end of the play. When it is suggested that given Alcestis' position as a wife, subject to the exchange of women, she might as well be dead,[2] it seems to me that this view overlooks what she herself had to say about her own enjoyment of life and her sorrow at having to leave it and miss being with her children. Ideologies aside, most people make adjustments. Unlike most dead people in tragedy Alcestis maintains a prominence that assures a warm welcome when she returns. It is her control of the plot that makes her precisely *not* a fetish.[3] Admetus in his turn acts as an artist using her as a model. At the end he self-consciously imitates the author in creating the woman who is "his other half"

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[1] The phrase is borrowed from Bob Dylan, "Love Minus Zero/No Limit," *Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965.

[2] Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, *Anxiety Veiled: Euripides and the Traffic in Women*, Ithaca, NY, 1993:76, 96.

[3] As Rabinowitz claims she is (97–9). I believe that neither the author nor the other characters "fetishize" her, although Admetus does, at the nadir of his exuberant despair, suggest building a replica of her.

without whom he cannot live. Alcestis had earlier told him that he must be both father and mother to the children. This is what he learns: what it means to be her. His grief finds expression when he *becomes* (like) her. This is why, I believe, his life really is different after her return to him. She is no longer a stranger. They are allowed a second chance. This is not very common in tragedy, but the *Alcestis* is not a tragedy.

Admetus has always been the problem. If we see him as a co-author in the artistic creation of his family, perhaps he will seem less an artist manqué. The perfect woman—who like all human beings loved her children and therefore, perhaps, found some reward in participating in the quiet heroism of living—turns out to be even more valuable alive. I do not mean to appear to be trying to reclaim Euripides for feminism but I am certain that he is saying that it is better to marry a wife than to bury one. If Alcestis dies in Admetus' fantasy, she returns to the life she wanted. *She* validates *his* life: he cannot take himself for granted any more.

Perhaps there are other more fruitful or more pleasant ways of looking at the female creations of male artists than the view that an artist supported by the state must in turn support the dominant ideology (which for ancient Athens unquestionably included the suppression of women), something which I find to be most improbable. I doubt if there is any *safe* art. In art a dominant ideology is a straw man, a pawn to be manipulated by the critics. The plays we have are not just phallocratic documents in the history of the repression of women to be read as proof texts of our retrogrievances. They are subtle and subversive. And most of all they are self-conscious.

One way of understanding the women of tragedy and their relation to the men is that suggested by Wendy Lesser[4] and Plato's symposiastic Aristophanes, the search for the lost half. Euripides has in the three plays considered here tried to present women as genuine "other halves." Not only of Admetus[5], but of Oedipus and Orestes. Electra waits for a brother who never existed even in Euripides' predecessors. Orestes always comes in secret, as he must. But her brother, the heroic avenger, remains so long in secret that he must be identified

[4] In *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women through Art*, Cambridge, MA, 1991:8, she writes, "The artists I've chosen to look at in this book, on the other hand, are men for whom the female face, the fictional self is not just a mask."

[5] Perhaps our discomfort with the fecklessness of Admetus causes us to diminish Alcestis, for giving her life on behalf of an unworthy object.

by a third party. What he finally becomes is the male clone of his sister. But that mask does not outlive his murderous encounter with his mother from which he is reborn as a failed son, his remorseful mother's penitent creation. Brother and sister share the crime and the failure, equally. Tragedy is about magnificent failures. In *Phoenissae* Jocasta survives what had previously been fatal knowledge for her and tries to control a political situation that has been predetermined by an implacable tradition to end in fratricide. For a time she acts as if she were free of the various males who have controlled her destiny. She fails. But her failure makes her a sharer in the grand failure of Oedipus, not just a victim. These three women add to the stories of which they are part. They were created to examine the traditional stories and to test them and to keep them alive.

Tragedy is not alone in failing to come to terms with the sadness of failure and death. The three plays examined here have scenes of breath-taking sorrow. Admetus strips his life bare and then rebuilds himself, a better self because it includes the feminine. Jocasta's perspective continues after her death in her daughter and even in her sons who reach the understanding in their dying looks that she had at the beginning. The despair of the murderer who realizes what she/he has done can hardly be ameliorated. In *Electra* this futile work is left to the aloof, aloft *dei ex machina* who can neither understand nor share what their mortal kinsmen have done and suffered. The moaning *is* the meaning.[6]

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[6] See Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, New York, 1984:1: "A poem's meaning is a poem's complaint..."

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